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HISTORICAL VIGNETTES

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HISTORICAL VIGNETTES

BY

BERNARD CAPES

AUTHOR OF "A JAY OF ITALY" ETC.

LONDON

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ADELPHI TERRACE

1910

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HISTORICAL VIGNETTES

GEORGE I

“HALT!” The voice of an officer rang out in the heavy twilight, and with a sudden scream of brakes and jangle of harness the cavalcade came to a stand.

“Tell the Herr von Gastein his Majesty desires to speak with him.” The name ran up the long line, quick and sharp, like a rattle of musketry, and passed out of hearing of him who had uttered it. “Tell the Herr Captain to come at once.”

The Herr Captain was already, on the word, spurring back from the head of the cortège, which was of royal extent. It stood upon a flat road in a flat country, covering more ground than and including almost as many human souls as a modern mail-train. There was the King’s coach for principal item—a veritable little room slung

on straps and drawn by eight horses ; and there were carriages—seven or eight, and each holding as many people—for his retinue, and baggage-wagons, and a troop of fifty sabres to escort the whole. It took so much, or more, to carry this little corpulent apoplectic on his annual visit to Herrenhausen, whither he had already travelled to within a league or so of Osnabrück and a much-needed night's rest.

The Captain von Gastein, having dismounted and thrown his reins to a groom, stood at stiff attention by the coach door. He was a patient, somewhat exhausted-looking man of fifty, spare-bodied, and with stone-blue eyes which rather matched the dusty Hanoverian blue of his uniform. His expression at the moment was one of a quiet fatality, as if the summons had not been altogether unforeseen by him.

A preternatural silence seemed to have succeeded the tumult of hoofs and wheels. There was a soundless blink of lightning in the sky, and a windmill on the flat roadside blackened and paled alternately in its flicker, as if it palpitated. It was late June, and the air seemed to have come out of a limekiln. The dust rolled up into it began to settle down sluggishly.

The door of the great travelling-coach opened, and a little bewigged gentleman, who had been peering from behind the glass, descended. His manner was dry, self-important, professional ; he was the King's English physician.

"His Majesty, my dear Captain," he whispered, "is in a strange mood. You are commanded to ascend and converse with him—you may guess why. The affair of last year—you understand? Old associations are re-awakened, old injuries re-exposed—you were intimately acquainted with their subject. Bear in mind that this sad event has interposed itself between his last departure from and his present revisit to his paternal dominions, and venture upon nothing in the nature of a reminder. If you find him fanciful, excited——"

A querulous voice, breaking from the interior of the carriage, interrupted him :

"Der Herr Jesus! What is all this chatter? Tell the man to enter."

The physician, placing a warning finger on his lips, skipped to one of the supplementary coaches ; the Captain von Gastein climbed into the royal vehicle. A postillion put up the steps ; the door was closed, the word given, and the

cavalcade lurched on. "Sit," motioned the King ; and the Herr Captain, with what steadiness he could command, settled himself on the edge of the broad seat backing upon the horses, and awaited, rigid and upright.

He was quite alone with his Majesty, and there was plenty of room for them both. The interior of the coach was like a cabinet, and luxuriously upholstered. There were accommodations for writing, card-playing, shaving, coffee-making, and other conveniences. The pace was leisurely, the motion restful ; the great wheels turned outside the windows with little apparent sound. The King of England lay in his padded corner opposite, a very weary, moodish little old man. His cheeks bagged, his eyes goggled, strained, and anxious ; the silk travelling-cloak in which he was wrapped only partly concealed his immense corpulence, and his thick legs and stumpy feet dangled short of the floor. His head was unwigged, and enveloped in a close cap with a fur border which came down over his eyes.

The officer, observant of everything, for all the respectful rigidity of his vision, could not but be conscious of a certain feeling of repulsion

in this his first close contact with the prince to whose unwelcome service, in one most tragic direction, he had devoted the best twenty-five years of his life. Twenty-five years it was since he had been ordered, a young impecunious captain, to the lonely castle of Ahlden on the Aller, where lived, already seven years incarcerated, the beautiful young wife of the then electoral Prince George—Sophia Dorothea, accused, rightly or wrongly, of misconduct with a Swedish adventurer. She was fair; unhappy; her husband had not loved her; the cold cruelty of his temperament had been confessed in this his consignment of her to a living grave. Had she not lain in his arms, borne him children? Gastein had needed no more to inflame his chivalry. Thenceforth he had given himself to the service of this lady, to ameliorate, to the best of his power, her bitter fate. His partiality, his sympathy, being, no doubt, reported, had kept him poor and unpromoted. For a quarter of a century he had shared his princess's exile, and had only returned to the world when death had ended that, less than a twelvemonth ago. After thirty-two years! And this was the unlovely Rhadamanthus who had condemned her, this little wheezy, pot-

bellied old frog of a man, who had become Elector of Hanover and King of England in the interval! The Captain had been educated to the right divine succession; but something monstrous in the picture struck him. His convictions and his emotions hurt one another in their efforts at a reconciliation. It was somehow not right that tragic beauty should lie at the mercy of this commonplace. He sat as stiff as a ramrod.

It is one of the most grotesque privileges of royalty to command silence. No one must address it unless addressed. Then, at its word, its gesture, the empty brass pot ceases to tinkle or the golden vessel overflows. This seems an unnatural impost, like taxing a man's daylight or his drinking-water. It gives an uncanny self-possession to the mortal who levies it. The little swollen tub of a creature, glowering in his corner, mutely discussed the figure opposite for as long as it pleased him, with no more concern, probably less, than he would have shown in regarding a black-beetle; and when he spoke at last it was even with some grudging in his cold, guttural voice.

“ You are of the escort, then, mein Herr? ”

The Captain, stiffening yet a trifle, saluted.
“As your Majesty commanded,” he said.

The other shrugged fretfully.

“I am glad,” he said, “to find something surviving to your sense of duty.”

Von Gastein made no answer. He ought not; he could not, indeed. That sense of warring emotions hurt him like a violent indigestion.

The King, for some minutes, condescended to speak no more, but sat looking out of the window upon the darkening flats and the white ribbon of the road reeling under him. What was in his mind? He had always declared, for some reason, that he would not long survive his wife; and she had died six months ago. Had he somehow cheated Fate—or might he have cheated it had he remained in England? This was his first visit to his patrimony since her death. Her death, her released spirit—turn the coach!

No, his beloved Herrenhausen! The stout little Guelph was no coward for all his love of life and good-living. A murrain on this old wives’ trash of spectres and premonitions! He glanced at the figure opposite—it sat up rigid and grey like a signpost—and, with a scowl, looked out of the window again.

Thirty-two years—a woman of sixty, and she had been a fresh, blooming young wife of twenty-eight when he had consigned her to her living death ! Much water, as they said in England, had flowed under London Bridge during that interval—the highways of life had been paved and repaved. Thirty-two years ! The Schloss was a dead, dreary place, situated in a dead, dreary country—a mere lonely manor-house in the wilds, good enough for a month's stay ; but—thirty-two years ! Gott in Himmel ! And she had been vivacious, worldly, sparkling with the glory of being and doing when he had last seen her !

A vision of the castle, as he had known it once or twice in the old, far-off days, rose before him. He saw again the leagues of flat marsh-land which surrounded it, the reedy river crawling by its walls, the grey alders shivering in the wind, and the wheeling of lonely plovers. He saw the sad towers, the cold, undecorated rooms, the windows looking out upon the lifeless waste of road. The road ! the livid unfruitful highway, upon which, for hours at a time, it had been said, dry burning eyes had been set, despairing for the mercy, the deliverance,

which never came ! For thirty-two years ! God in heaven ! while the frost of age slowly settled on the beautiful eyes, the deep black hair, the breaking heart ! With a writhe, as of physical suffering, the old man turned from his window.

“ The life was dull at Schloss Ahlden ? ” he said.

“ Dull, sire.”

The correct, impassive attitude of the Captain maddened while it half cowed him. For a minute he held his breath—only to release it in a sudden question, unexpected, astounding :

“ In your eyes, soldier, *she* was innocent ? ”

Von Gastein started under the shock—and recovered himself.

“ During the twenty-five years, sire, I had the privilege of attending on her the Princess of Ahlden did not fail weekly to take the Sacra-
ment, and on each occasion to avow her innocence before the altar.”

The King stared, then mumbled from loud to low.

“ They will avow it,” he began, and broke off quickly. Some words reported to him, as having been uttered by her to one seeking to bring about a reconciliation before his enthronement,

recurred to his mind : " If I am guilty, I am not worthy to be your Queen ; if I am innocent, your King is not worthy to be my husband."

A casuistry, feminine, non-committing—hedging, in the true sporting sense. He hardened. This fate had not after all seemed so merciless to one so guilty.

" She had liberty," he said, as if appealing to his own conscience.

The Captain made a frigid reverence, acquiescing in the enormous lie.

" I say, she had liberty," repeated the King —" permission to drive abroad."

" For six miles, sire, back and forth," answered the soldier, as if he accounted himself addressed : " for six miles west, to the old stone bridge on the Hayden road. So much and no more. At the bridge the escort turned her. On fine days she would drive herself—fast and faster, till the stones spun from the wheels. She would seem to madden for freedom, to outstrip her misery. Many times she would traverse the distance, the lady-in-waiting sitting, the troop spurring at her side ; and at the stone bridge it would be always the same. ' No further ? ' ' No further, madam.' ' Ah ! but death will release me ! ' "

He stopped, conscious of his own emotion. He had served the lovely sorrow so long, that its tragedy had become part of himself.

"I crave your Majesty's forgiveness," he muttered in a broken voice.

The King spoke up harshly :

"She was limited to that road by necessity."

"During life, sire."

The response came swift and involuntary. The soldier gasped, having made it.

"You will stop the coach, and return to your duty," said the King, blue in the face.

The former commotion was repeated ; the physician returned to his patient ; the cavalcade rolled on. His Majesty spoke not a single word further, but sat staring from the window. It was deep dusk now without, and the lightning flickered with a ghastlier brilliancy. But still the King would give no order to have the lamps lighted. Instead, he lay with his livid face and protruding eyes addressed to the heavens, and the horror of a thought incessant in his mind. *The road was open to her at last, and she was driving to cut him off from Osnabrück, the city in which he had been born.* She knew that a man could not die in the room where he was born ;

and she was coming to forestall him with the dread summons to appear before his Maker, and answer for the thing he had done.

* * * * *

Much agitated, von Gastein remounted his horse, and spurred on to his place in the front. He did more ; he drove ahead of all, and took the lead on the solitary road making for Osnabrück. The lights of the city were already faintly staring the distance, when a sound coming from in front startled and then thrilled him. Swift wheels, and the hoofs of a tearing horse ! There was nothing uncommon in that ; and yet his heart went cold to hear it. “ God have mercy on me ! ” he muttered : “ I am a fool ! ”

Nearer and nearer came the sound—it was close—it was upon him—and there rushed past the shadow of a cabriolet, with a wild woman on the seat flogging a wild black horse. The night of her hair streamed behind like a thin cloud dusted with diamonds, and there was a frenzy of triumph in her eyes, and on her lips a smile. And so she passed and was gone.

The Captain turned his horse’s head, and drove back upon the van.

"Stop her!" he yelled. "In God's name stop her Highness before too late!"

They were jogging on leisurely, and thought him drunk or demented.

"What Highness, Captain?" they said.
"There has been none passed this way."

And on the word there came a loud cry from the rear, and for the third time the cavalcade halted. But von Gastein had sped by like the wind, and reached to where the royal carriage was stopped amid a little cloud of equerries; and a dismayed, small figure stood upon the step by the open door.

"His Majesty," said the physician, gasping over his words, "has had a stroke, and is dead!"

FOUQUIER-TINVILLE

"IF your life has ever known one act of self-sacrifice, bear, for your consolation, its memory 'to the scaffold.'

With a stiff smile on his lips, and those words of the President of the reconstituted Court in his ears, Antoine Quentin Fouquier de Tinville, late Public Prosecutor to the Revolutionary Tribunal, turned to follow his guard.

This was at seven o'clock of a May evening, and twelve or fourteen hours remained to him in which to collect his thoughts and settle his affairs. At ten on the following morning the tumbrils would arrive at the archway to the Cour du Mai, and he and his fifteen condemned jury-men would start on their long road of agony to the Place de la Révolution, whither, or elsewhere, on a like errand, he himself had already despatched so many thousands.

Those words of the President somehow haunted him.

So many thousands—dismissed to their deaths, without remorse or pity, from that same *salle de la liberté* in which he had just stood his own trial! How familiar it had all seemed, how matter-of-course, how inevitable!—the relentless hands of the clock, creeping on to the pre-meditated doom-stroke; the hungry, bestial faces lolling at the barriers; the voices of the street entering by the open windows, and seeming to comment derisively on the drawling evidence, selected to convict. He had known the procedure so well, had been so instrumental in creating it, that any defence had well seemed a mockery of the methods of the Palais de Justice.

"I have been a busy man," he had said. "I forget things. Are we to be held accountable for every parasite we destroy in crushing out the life of a monster?"

That had appeared a reasonable plea. What did not seem reasonable was the base sums he had personally amassed out of the destruction of the parasites, the bribes he had accepted, his subornation of witnesses, his deafness to the just

pleas of unprofitable virtue, his neglect of the principles of brotherhood. He had held one of the first offices of the fraternal State, and had made of it a wholly self-seeking vehicle. He had seen his *chance* in the mad battle of a people for liberty, and had used it to rob the dead. There was, in truth, no more despicable joint in that "tail of Robespierre" which Sanson was busily engaged just now in docking than this same Antoine Quentin. And yet he believed himself aggrieved.

That night he wrote to his second wife, from his cell in the Conciergerie, to which he had been returned, the following words :

" I shall die, heart and hands pure, for having served my country with too much zeal and activity, and for having conformed to the wishes of the Government."

It bettered Wolsey's cry in the singleness of its reproach.

The problem of all villainy is that it regards itself with an obliquity of vision for which it seems hard to hold it accountable. Given a lack of the moral sense, and how is a man to make an honest living? Tinville—or de Tinville, mark you—became an attorney

because he was poor, and then a rascal because he was an attorney. There are always many thousands living in an odour of respectability whom fortune alone saves from a like revelation of themselves. But that is not to say that, in the general purification of society, the lethal chamber is not the best answer to the problem.

This man was by nature a callous, coarse-grained ruffian, constitutionally insensible to the pleas of humanity, and with the self-protective instinct prominently developed in him as in brutes. You could not regard his sallow, grim-jawed face-structure, his staring, over-bushed black eyes, his thin-lipped mouth, perpetually mobile in sneers and spitting scorns and cynicisms, and affect to read in them any undersuggestion of charity or benevolence. Numbers, poor obsequious wretches, had essayed the monstrous pretence, and had pitifully retracted their heresy under the axe. He was forty-seven years of age; he had lived every day of his later manhood in secret scorn and abuse of the principles he had hired himself to advocate; and only where his personal interests were not affected had it ever been possible to credit him with a deed of grace, or, at the best, of passive indifference.

"If your life has ever known one act of self-sacrifice!"

He had done kind things in his time, two or three ; but had they ever included "one act of self-sacrifice"? Had he not conceded them, rather, for the very contrary reason? He tried to think it out. The question worried him oddly and persistently ; it seemed to have absorbed every other ; he groped perpetually for an answer to it through the whirling chaos of his mind. There had been the wife and daughters of the Marquis de Miranion, whom he had shielded in their peril because once, when he had been a young man contemplating Orders, they had shown him kindness. He suddenly remembered the case, and remembered too that his condescension had occurred at a time when the despotic nature of his office had held him virtually immune from criticism or misrepresentation. Again, there had been the young virgins of Verdun, condemned and executed for offering sweetmeats to the King of Prussia. He had pitied them ; but pity was inexpensive, and, at the moment, not unpopular. There had been —what else had there been? He flogged his brains for a third instance, and, not being

successful, had to fall back upon the minor amenities. Little convivial generosities (for he had been a *camarade*, a *joyeux-vivant*, in his rough way), little family indulgences, and sensual concessions—he had these to set against the habitual inhuman greed which had made him the most squalid, soulless Harpagon of his tribe. Insolent to weakness, truckling to power, his interest in the awful part he had played had never risen above self-interest. The very list of the great names he had extinguished represented nothing to his ignoble mind but so many opportunities seized by him to acquire personal gain or personal safety. Vergniaud the ineffable, Corday the magnificent, Lavoisier the gentle, Hébert the dastard, Danton the tremendous—these, to take but a handful, he had despatched to their graves with a like indifference to the principles which had brought them subject to his chastisement. There were no principles in his creed but self-gain and self-preservation. From the poor Austrian “plucked hen” at one limit of the tale to Robespierre at the other, he had been always as ready to cut short a saint as a rogue in the vindication of that creed. He simply could not understand any other ; and

yet the words of the President were worrying him horribly.

He had answered them, at the time, after his nature—that is to say, with servility while a thread of hope remained, and afterwards with loud scorn and venomous defiance. Brazen by constitution, he was not to reveal himself soft metal at the last. Trapped and at bay, he snarled like a tiger, confessing his yellow fangs at their longest. Hope might exist for other men ; but he knew too well it was ended. He himself had stabbed it to death with a thousand wounds.

And yet he was racked with a sense of grievance.

And yet those words of the President tormented him.

He spoke, and wrote, and raged—throughout the brief interval of life which remained to him he was seldom still. But always the one sentence floated in letters of dim fire in the background of his mind. He had a mad feeling that if only once he could recall the necessary instance, he would be equipped with the means to defy his enemies—to defy heaven and hell and earth. That was a strange obsession for

a sceptic and atheist, but it clung to him. The words, and the rebuke that they implied, were for ever in his brain, crossing its dark wastes like a shaft of light peopled with tiny travelling motes, which bore some relation, only in an insignificant form, to the tremendous business of the day, and yet seemed to have survived that business as its only realities. Thus through the texture of the ray came and went little absurd memories of a cut that juryman Vilate, a fellow-prisoner, had made upon his chin in shaving, of an early queen-wasp that had come and droned about the presidential desk during the droning indictment, of the face of an old shrewd, wintry hag which had peered out, white and momentary, from among the crowd of spectators, and had been as swiftly absorbed back into it.

The face ! His wandering mind brought up on the recollection of it with an instant shock. The hate, the tumult, all other foam-white faces of the court, seemed in one moment to drop and seethe away from it like a spent wave, and to leave it flung up alone, stark, motionless, astounding.



At ten came the tumbrils, together with the prescriptive guard of sixty gendarmes to escort them to the scaffold. The ex-Public Prosecutor mounted to his place, dogged, baleful, heroic, according to his lights. He could not help bullying even his fellow-sufferers ; but from the outset there was a strange, searching gleam in his eyes, which never left them until they were closed for ever.

From the Quai de l'Horloge came the first roar of the mob, as rabid to flesh its teeth in the accuser as it had ever been in the accused. Already, as the Pont Neuf was reached, a running, howling *valetaille* of blackguards and prostitutes was travelling with the procession. Lumbering onwards, between ranks of many-windowed houses alive with screaming faces and waving hands, the carts traversed the rues la Monoie and du Roule, and turned into the long stretch of the rue St. Honoré, which ended only at the bend into the great square of the guillotine.

They cursed him all the way ; he cursed them back. The habit of his lips spat venom, while his brain ignored and his vision overlooked them.

"Where are thy batches now, Antoine?" they screamed.

"Ravening curs!" he thundered; "is thy bread cheaper lacking them?"

All the time his eyes were going with the running crowd, searching it, beating it like covert, hunting for something on which they hungered to fasten. And suddenly they found it—*the figure of a little withered old woman, bearing a gross green umbrella in her hand.*

She was there in a moment, moving in pace with the carts, a dead twig borne on the living stream, now afloat, now under, but always reappearing—bobbing out grotesque and vital, and dancing on her way. She was of the poorest class, bent, lean, tattered, and her face was quite hidden behind the wings of a frowsy cap. No one seemed to observe her; only the eyes of the condemned gloated on her movements, followed them, watched her every step with an intense greed that never wavered. For she it was who stood to him, at last, for that single act of self-sacrifice with the instance of which he was to refute his slanderers and defy the grave.

It had come upon him, all at once, with the

memory of that face, projected, livid and instant, from the mist of faces that had walled him in. He had recalled how, on a certain wet and dismal evening months ago, he had been crossing the Pont St. Michel on his way home after an exhausting day, when the gleam of a gold coin lying in the kennel had arrested his attention. Avaricious in the most peddling sense, he had been stooping eagerly to grasp his find, when the interposition of a second body had halted him unexpectedly on his way.

“ Bon Dieu, little citizen, let the old rag-sorster be happy for once ! ”

He had heard the febrile plea ; had checked himself and had looked. It was an old, old woman, grotesque, battered, drenched with rain. In her trembling claw, nevertheless, she had borne a shapeless green umbrella, an article sufficiently preposterous in that context of poverty and sans-culottism. No doubt the dislocation of the times accounted for her possession of it. It had burst open as she grabbed at the coin, and out had rolled a sodden red cabbage, fished from some mixen. It had borne an uncanny resemblance to a severed head, and had made him start for the moment.

"Let the old rag-sorter be happy for once."

And, with a laugh, he had let her clutch the gold, restore the cabbage to its receptacle, and hobble off breathing benedictions on his head. God knew why he had let her—God would know. And yet God was a cipher in the scheme of things. Only, from the moment when the President had uttered those words, he had been looking—he knew it now—for the old rag-sorter to refute them. She could testify, if she would, that his life had not been entirely devoid of disinterested self-sacrifice. He had once, for another's sake, refused a ten-franc piece.

How had she risen, and whence followed? There had been something unearthly in the apparition; there was something unearthly in his present possession by it. Yet, from the moment of his mental identification of the face, he had expected to renew the vision of it, to take it up somewhere between the prison and the scaffold, and he would have been perplexed only to find his expectation at fault. His witnesses were not wont to fail him, and this, the most personal of any, he could not afford to spare. He dwelt upon the flitting figure with

a passion of interest which blinded him to the crowd, deafened him to its maledictions. Automatically he roared back blasphemy for hate ; subliminally he was alone in Paris with his old rag-sorter.

He could never see her face ; yet he knew it was she as surely as he knew himself. She went on and on, keeping pace with the cart, threading the throng, and always, it seemed, unobserved by it.

And then, all in a moment, the guillotine—and he was going up the steps to it !

He turned as he reached the platform. For an instant, tumult and a sense of mad disaster hemmed him in. There was a foam of upturned faces, vaster than anything he had yet realised ; there was the tall, lean yoke, with its wedge of dripping steel swung up between ; there was the lunette, the little window, and the corners, just visible, of the deep basket beyond into which he was to vomit his life. They were hauling away the trunk of the last victim, a ludicrous, flabby welter, into the red cart adjacent. What a way to treat a man—soulless, obscene ! For one instant a deadly sickness overpowered him ; he turned his head away—and saw her panting

up the steps, confessed, but yet unnoticed, a jocund leer on her withered old face.

Then suddenly something happened. The thundering voice of the crowd rose to an exultant pitch; there was a crash, a numbing jerk—and he was erect again, amazed and flung at liberty.

But even in that supreme moment his vision sought out his old rag-sorter, and was for her alone. She was down on her knees, eager and mumbling, stuffing something into her green umbrella. What was it—a red cabbage—a head? He caught a glimpse of it as it went in—and it was his own head—the head of Antoine Quentin Fouquier de Tinville, ex-Public Prosecutor to the Revolutionary Tribunal.

THE QUEEN'S NURSE

FRIVOLOUS she may have been, shallow and light-hearted as a brook, but not heartless. Her nurse—she who, in modern parlance, had “taken her from the month” and had fed and bred her in the house of her father, Sir John Seymour, of Wiltshire, knight—would always defend her tooth and nail from that charge. And when at last, having followed her nursling’s dancing career through the Courts of the old gloomy Louvre and the more splendid Whitehall, she came to see her supplant in the royal caprice the unhappy Queen whose maid-of-honour she had been, she would allow in her presence no breath of detraction to slur the good fame of her darling, but would constantly aver that she had fought against the inevitable with all the desperation of which her buoyant nature was capable. Jane could never say nay to the least plausible beggar in the world, she would declare ;

and what was her chance when that suppliant was King Harry himself? She loved life, to be sure, the sweet butterfly—who would not with such a disposition? And when the alternative was to be broken on a wheel! How many, though deeper ones, would have chosen that in her place, she would like to know? And here was she about to justify her monarch's choice by presenting him with a male heir—the heir for whom he had been growling and raging these twenty years past. She had no doubt it would be a male, since her bird always gave every one what he asked. And she had come to nurse her nursling through her first troublous days in this the new great palace of Hampton that the red Cardinal had built.

So she believed up to the last, and at that last the King, the least plausible beggar, sat all alone one wild October evening in the great oriel window of the great hall at the Court. It blew and rained boisterously without, and the wet, red leaves were dashed against the glass, where they ran down like gouts of blood. Their hue was reflected in the royal eyes, which stared out upon the desolate prospect between wrath and anxiety. Henry's conscience was gnawing at

his heart, in truth, and despot-like he resented the pain.

The tapers burned under that vaulted gloom like glow-worms in a dark avenue ; the residue of a discarded feast lay tumbled about the tables. Apart from the golden dishes, the piles of fruit, the crusted goblets and great flagons of wine, he sat in his tremendous isolation, and fought the fight between desire and humanity. It was never, alas ! but a brief struggle with him. He rose in a moment, a heavy, butcher-like figure of a man, a huge common hulk made formidable by padded doublet and "blistered" sleeves all roped and starred with gems, and, his lips puffing, the scant ginger hair bristling on his swollen neck and jowls, thundered an order into space. Instant to it an obsequious page leaped into the Presence.

"Sir Anthony Denny—summon him."

The page vanished ; the King strode up and down. At the fourth turn he paused to see a figure bow before him. This figure, for contrast, was robed all in black, with a tight coif on its head, and, hanging from its shoulders, a long, sleeveless gown edged with brown fur. It was the figure, livid and drawn-faced, of the

chief barber-surgeon attending on her Majesty the Queen's confinement.

"Sir Anthony," said the King, "make note of our decision. Meseemeth in this realm of ours that wives be plenty, but heirs most sorely lack. Poor Jane must suffer for the succession. If one must perish——" He paused.

"It is even so, your Majesty," murmured the physician.

The King stamped his foot, and turned away.

"I must have my heir," he said. "God's blood, I must and will!"

But that night, as he was crossing a corridor to his cabinet, an old woman broke upon him with tears and lamentations.

"They are killing my bird!"

"Peace, fool!" said the King, harsh and lowering. "I must have mine heir, though all birds fell dumb from this moment."

She clung to him, but he shook her off roughly, and went on his way. She followed, importunate and beyond fear.

"Spare my nursling! She is one and only; thou canst not renew her; but many shall be her gifts of love to thee."

He turned like a goaded bull, and the woman was dragged away.

That night the little Prince was born ; and thereafter the wreck from which he had been delivered settled down, and on the twelfth day it sank into the fathomless deeps.

The King was sorry for a while ; but he had his heir to reward him for the sacrifice he had made. Mary Tudor, a girl of twenty, and already as sour as crabs, was the little dead queen's chief mourner. The trumpets brayed her obsequies, the laureate sang them in execrable verse, the baby — a pinched atom — screamed them. Only the old nurse sat dumb and dry-eyed, taking no notice of anything.

She would have nothing to do with the Prince, craved or claimed no part in his rearing. But presently she took her spinning-wheel to the little dark room by the chapel which had been allotted her ; and there she would sit all day drawing flax from the distaff.

One noon, the door being open, the King in passing saw her thus occupied, and went in. She neither moved nor acknowledged his presence, but went on with her spinning. His eyes began to redder in the way all knew.

"What spinnest thou?" he demanded.

"Flax," she answered, grim and quiet, without stopping in her work.

"For what?" he roared.

"Thy shroud," she said, "and that of all thy house."

Those with him thought the roof would have fallen. He raised his own blazing eyes to it, as if in momentary doubt of his omnipotence. But when he spoke at last it was noted with amazement that his words were temperate.

"That shall we see, old dotard," he said.
"Dispart her wheel and her."

She stood up, with a smile on her thin lips, as they snatched her wheel away.

"Dispose them," said the King, "where neither may avail the other. And, for her, take her incontinent in her sorcery, and put her where she may weave a shroud of darkness for evermore."

He spoke, and passed out; and, as he had ordered, so was it done. The spinning-wheel was cast into a cupboard under the great staircase, and the nurse disappeared from human ken. Nothing more was heard of her for ten long years.

At the end of that time the King's majesty lay ill. His huge bombard of a body was swollen with gout and dropsy ; a mere rust of hair remained to his gross head ; his hearing was capricious, and his eyes rheumy with half-blindness. He had grown slovenly in his dress ; his every breath bullied the sweet air for ease and comfort ; and, to cap all, his temper had grown with his deformities till hardly a man durst meet his eye.

Lying at Whitehall, he had a dream one night which troubled him. He sent for Sir Anthony Denny, always now in close attendance, and, heaving himself on his elbow, glared at the physician through a mist of anguish.

" Give me," he said, " to mend this whirring in my brain."

Sir Anthony, quaking in his list slippers, prescribed and administered a febrifuge. It availed little. Day and night the buzzing noise went on until it grew to madness. One morning the King groaned in torture : " It droneth, droneth for ever like a wheel ! " and of a sudden sat up as if stricken.

" The old beldame's ! " he whispered. " What of it ? "

It was some time before the alarmed leech could gather the import of his question, and then he hurried to have inquiries made. A special courier was despatched boot and spur to Hampton Court. But in these full years the very memory of the incident had vanished, and none knew where the wheel had been deposited. Only it seemed that others there had been haunted of late by a mysterious sound, so that none dared venture by the great staircase whence it appeared to proceed. And that was the message returned, in fear and trembling, to the tyrant.

He raged : “ I will have no mysteries in my house. Pluck the stairway down.”

A despot’s will is law. In preparing to obey it the masons came upon the wheel. The King, being informed of the discovery, roared like a wounded tiger.

“ Burn the thing to ashes ! ” he thundered, and, on the very word, turned white and mumbled. “ Nay,” he said, in a fallen voice, “ put it where the arts of Satan may not prevail with it ; hide it away in my royal chapel, and the fiend shall be baffled. And look you that none comes near me in the night again to choke me in my shroud.”

His mind was impaired ; it was evident that he was approaching his end ; yet through all his desperation and mental anguish the inflexible will, which had surmounted all other wills of half the world, remained true, as history knows, to its dogged traditions. Almost his last breath was given to confirm the death sentence passed on a great subject. If one bitterer pang than another rent his released spirit, it must have been that which showed him his final vengeance unaccomplished.

And, in the meanwhile, none dared approach him with the truth of his nearing dissolution. He had killed men in the past for prophesying his mortality. He had held death so cheaply, had carried it so lightly in the hollow of his hand, that he could not believe it capable of striking at his omnipotence.

But there came a time when the truth could be no longer withheld from him, and Sir Anthony Denny was the one deputed to break it. He approached his task with a very natural apprehension, the more so as his Majesty had that morning shown some increased signs of confidence in his own recovery. He greeted the physician's return with a distorted smile.

"I shall live to plague mine enemies yet," he said, "so I can pluck this cursed hornet from my brain. Look you, man, I see a cause. It is my mind accusing me of an over-harshness in the past. Poor Jane her nurse, that old demented fool! Well, she loved her; the debt is paid; let her go free, I say."

The physician stood aghast. He had been half expecting this thunderbolt ever since the King's sick fancy had raised the dust of a long-forgotten sentence.

"Your Majesty," he whispered, "your Majesty! The beldame died in prison this very day se'nnight."

"This day!" The King struggled into a sitting posture. His face was like nothing human. "This day se'nnight!" He battled for breath. "It was when the sound began. God's mercy! the wheel!"

"Alas, your Majesty!" half whimpered the leech; "there be those who say they cannot hear themselves pray for its whirring. The chapel is deserted."

The King fell back, and raised his hands feebly, as if drawing something over his face. For an instant it appeared to the agitated

physician as if a shroud of white had actually hidden it ; but, on nearer approach, he saw that it was the frost of death that had fallen.

Long years after, a tradition which had for ages associated a muffled, incomprehensible droning with the occurrence of any death in the palace received, " in the white winter of its age," a curious justification. Some workmen, in breaking through a wall of the old chapel, came upon an ancient spinning-wheel hidden away behind the panelling.

LOUIS XIV

LOOKING over the inner Cour de Marbre at Versailles Palace were two little rooms, in the main pile of the building, which constituted the very core of privacy in the Petits Appartements du Roi. One was his Majesty's "den," the other his wig-room, and both were elegantly simple, almost severe, in their appointments. In the Galerie des Glaces adjoining, marble, paint, crystal, and silver, in lavish profusion, represented to the public eye the habitual equipage of a Grand Monarch; these more restful surroundings represented to the monarch himself his secret possession of some emotions felt in common with the vulgar herd, to wit, the joys of a retreat where he could do just as he liked, without the necessity of posing to himself or others. A few chairs, a table, a secrétaire—all profusely painted and be-ormolued, it was true, but for the simple reason that beauty unadorned

was un procurable in the Paris of the period—sober hangings, a quiet picture or so—such was the furniture of the little apartment appropriated by Louis XIV. to his inmost meditations.

We find him in this distinguished snuggerly on a certain afternoon of the year 1704—the twenty-first of August, to be exact. It is within three days of St. Bartholomew, a feast which his Most Catholic Majesty makes a particular point of solemnising. He is, in fact, pondering a minor detail of its observances at this very moment.

As he sits, his eyes fixed on nothingness in crinkled abstraction, we will seize the fearful opportunity to scrutinise him. He is sixty-six years of age, and in suggestion, we think, more like a queen-dowager than a monarch. His minute stature, his old-matronly face, worldly, shrewd, not unkindly ; his immense falling wig, resembling a cap with hanging wattles ; his feminine particularities and prejudices, all combine to convey that false impression of his sex. He has a woman's tastes for dainty clothes and china and gossip ; I am convinced that, were it possible to conceive him stooping to the condescension, he would play the part of Madame

more realistically than the Chevalier d'Eon himself came to play it.

He is attired (for monarchs do not dress) in a full-skirted coat of apricot velvet, with silver frogs. The coat is left unbuttoned from neck to waist, revealing an ample breast of cambric and a rich lace cravat. His white silk stockings are rolled back over their garters, which are fastened above the knee, and embrace breeches of the same velvet material ; and stiff diamond-buckled shoes, with square toes, long tongues, and very high silver heels, complete the exquisite picture.

So he poses, and posed, as punctilious in his homage to himself as any courtier. If he did not appear, in bulk, a star of the first magnitude, he was as brilliant a centre as his own dazzled system need desire.

An odd train of thought was in Louis's mind as he sat thus gazing into vacancy. The nearness of the Feast of St. Bartholomew was its central subject, since it entailed the repetition of a custom long practised by him to significant effect. Or had there been any connection between the custom and the effect? That was just the question in his mind. He was

inclining, for some extraordinary reason, to doubt for the first time their relationship. It had come upon him all in an instant at what, adopting the fashion, we must call a psychologic moment in his career.

He was not, according to some people, a really wise man ; but there was no denying that he was a supremely self-sufficient. It had never occurred to him, in all his life, that his judgment could possibly be surpassed by another. That was the queer thing. He had tacitly, almost unconsciously, it seemed, permitted, in one curious instance, his mental supremacy to subordinate itself to a superstition. He appeared to recognise the fact all at once, and with an amazement that was like one of those sudden developments of reason which a child will exhibit between a single night's sleeping and waking. Something had happened to him, and he saw himself in a moment—not a fool ; that were impossible—but, in a certain solitary direction, a dupe to his own modesty. Quality, kingship, all his greatness as it stood, he had let be accounted, by default, less to the essence of divinity in himself than to a paltry charm, in the accidental possession of which any quack-

salver might boast himself omniscient. He felt strangely small all of a sudden.

Presently he stirred, and threw out his chest. Small ! He, Louis ? Had he not made France what she was ? Had he not in the blood of two great wars, prolonged, triumphant, deadly, cemented the fabric of state of which he stood, golden, sacrosanct, the supreme expression ? Was he not at this date the most powerful monarch, the most glorious, the most dreaded that a dazzled world had ever worshipped ? And since some there remained who questioned his pre-eminence, were not his armies at this moment opening a third victorious campaign in order to re-convince the recalcitrants ? And to what was all this success to be attributed—to his own mastering genius, inspired, stupendous, or to his possession of a trumpery talisman, whose favour, even, was conditional ?

He drew in his breath, with a slight hissing sound, as if he had been stung. Superstition ? an aberration, to which the mightiest were subject. He thanked his majestic stars only that the knowledge of it was private to himself.

He half rose, and sank into his chair again,

with a frown. It was his custom, he told himself haughtily, to command Destiny, not truckle to it. How had he come to concede even this single exception to his custom? There was a blind spot, it was said, in every eye; perhaps there was some like defect in every kingly constitution. The heel of Achilles! Or, maybe—what else?

Age!

The word seemed to smite him out of the depths. He almost jumped where he sat. This business, so childish in its credulity! Merciful Heaven! was it possible he could be verging on his *second* childhood—he, Louis, who had almost come to convince himself that he was destined to the fiery chariot? Of late the sun discs, the emblems of the *Roi soleil*, had increased in number on his walls and ceilings. Perhaps they, too, were a sign of his dotage.

He hesitated no longer, but, rising hastily, sought the secrétaire against the wall, and, feeling in a very remote and secret little recess of it, brought out a tiny packet, somewhat like a Hebrew phylactery in suggestion. It was no more than a couple of inches or so square, of

vellum, flattish in form, and closely sealed with an odd, incomprehensible device. A number of pin-pricks perforated it.

As he stood, holding the thing in his hand, the time and occasion on which he had consented to its acceptance rose vividly before him. It had been a black night in a certain October long past, when a dark Italian monk, a famed astrologer, had waited on him by appointment in his Sèvres villa. He recalled how, consequent on his casting of the royal horoscope, this sardonic Genethliac had offered him (for a weighty consideration), as a defence against certain threatened complications in his royal ecliptic, the very talisman he now regarded, and which, saddled with a condition, was to procure him consistent happiness and prosperity throughout his reign. And he recalled how he had accepted the terms, covenanting, on pain of disaster, to preserve the charm intact, and, moreover, to plunge, on the occasion of every notable Church festival, a pin through its sides.

A naïve undertaking, perhaps, yet seeming justified in its results. Half credulous, half contemptuous, and entirely good-humoured, he had

been faithful to the conditions, and had certainly prospered. The thing had become a habit with him, and his conscience had never felt a scruple in its performance. Why should it? Was not the bestower of the gift a consecrated priest? He could find a hundred reasons for tolerating his superstition, and not one for condemning it. Probably, if the truth were known, the packet contained what might be called a black, or contrary relic—a lock of Judas's hair, a shaving of Ananias's toe-nail, a scale of Saladin's liver, or one shed by the devil himself when he struggled in St. Dunstan's tongs. Or more likely it contained nothing at all, and had served for a mere trick to extort money.

He held it out at arm's length, with a smile on his face. The absurdity of his compliance had struck him all at once acutely. That his destiny, through all these long years, could have hung at the mercy of so ridiculous a trifle! He was great because he was great, a conqueror by force of inherent genius. Away for once and for ever with the imposture!

One moment he held the packet up to the light, and saw a hundred tiny stars shine through the punctures he had made in it on successive

feasts ; the next he broke the seals, unfolded the vellum, stared, dropped the whole on the floor, and staggered back as if stricken to the heart.

There, at his feet, it lay revealed before him—the thing that he had done ; and he knew that he, the most Christian King, he who had revoked the Edict of Nantes, he who had rooted up the tares and made all France one crop of catholicity, he who stood for Heaven's vicegerent, its high priest, its super-pope, had been for years stabbing the Blessed Host, the consecrated wafer !

As he thus dwelt, motionless, aghast, a knock came at his door. He collected himself by a wrenching effort, and bade the intruder into his presence.

It was a courier from the Maréchal de Villeroi, introduced by a favoured courtier. Both men were agitated and death-pale. They came to inform his Majesty that his entire army, under Marshal Tallard, had been destroyed, or had capitulated to the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim, in Bavaria.

The King at first answered nothing ; but his eyes were observed to wander towards a scrap

of vellum, apparently insignificant, which lay upon the floor. And then he recovered himself, with a courageous smile.

"But that is very bad news, my friend," he said.

NAPOLEON

IT was the fourth of July, 1809, and a thunderous, close evening. In Lobau, the largest of the five islands on the Danube, where were the imperial headquarters, the huge machinery of war, human and insentient, was getting up steam, so to speak, for the morrow's milling, and eliciting, as its flywheel slowly revolved, an automatic response in all its myriad parts from Pressburg to Vienna. The occasion, it might be said, was an emergency occasion. If the Emperor, himself commanding, had not been thrashed by the Austrians, under the Archduke Charles, a couple of months earlier at Aspern, his retreat upon the islands had looked so much like a defeat, that for the moment his supremacy, moral and material, hung in the balance. For the first time the Grand Army had suffered a shock to its *amour-propre* and its hitherto invincible faith in its

leader. A little might turn the scale, and send all its disintegrated legions scuttling back to Strasburg.

That the impenetrable "Antichrist" himself was fully aware of the nature of the hazard there is no reason to doubt, or that he was concentrating all the deepest faculties of his genius on the delivery of a blow which should be immense and final. He was much alone in his tent, and his orders were laconic and momentous. The ordinary mind cannot picture such a situation, and dismiss its surrounding distractions—one might say its hauntings. There were the arsenals, the forges, the rope walks, the sheds for boat-mending, the canteens and parks of artillery all over the five islands; there were the boats themselves in the river, scores of them, and the massive chains which bound them into bridges; there were the ammunition wagons and their loaded boxes, the forests of piled arms, the tossed oceans of tents, the miles of tethered horses, the ring-fences of palisades; and there were the troops for last, enough to people a great city, and each man of them as cheerily busy as if he were one of an exodus of Israelites picketing on his way to the promised land. Seven

weeks before this same island of Lobau had been littered with the legs and arms of those wounded at Aspern—limbs hastily severed and flung helter-skelter among the grass of its meadows. Its soil was soaked with blood; thousands of mangled men and horses had sunk screaming in the waters which thundered by its shores; a hail of iron had smashed into it and its even more luckless neighbours; fire from burning mills had roared down upon its bridges, melting men and metal into one horrible annealing; it had heaved and vomited with the filth of war. And had all that hideous picture a place in the background of the master-mind, or had its present aspect, of busy preparation for another scene as sickening, or worse? One sorrow may have haunted him, one bloody ghost out of all the multitudes—the figure of his old comrade Marshal Lannes, as he had seen him borne hither on a litter of branches and muskets on the fatal day—one shattered horror more to feed the carnage. He had been moved a moment, had wept, and kissed the dying man. An unconscious thought of him may have lingered still like a melancholy shadow in his soul. But, for the rest, one may be sure that he looked

over and beyond all these things, as a great architect sees through the maze of scaffolding the glory of the fabric his soul has raised. This man, it is to be supposed, ever regarded a battlefield but as a map, so clear to his mind, that, as the opposing troops manœuvred on it, he could check or reinforce them, show them the way to defeat or victory with his eyes shut. He was a calculating "freak," and as such superhuman—or superdiabolic.

As the dark gathered, lit only by the flickering lightnings, an immense hush fell over the islands. Every lamp and fire was extinguished ; the multitudinous tramp of moving hosts mingled with the boom of the river, and became part with it ; the song of the bugles, soft and short, mounted on the wind, and fled with its shrilling through the branches of the trees. One might never have guessed the universal movement that was taking itself cover, as it were, under these silences, as if the islands themselves had been unmoored, and were drifting soundlessly, with their freight of death, towards the shores.

In the midst, a little cry, sharp and sudden, rang out in the neighbourhood of the Emperor's tent—it might have been a trodden bird's ; it

passed, and was not repeated. A young officer, de Sainte Croix, of the personal staff, hurried towards the spot. It was he, vigorous and enthusiastic, who had often gained the Emperor's approval by climbing tall trees on the island to watch the Austrian preparations on the distant plain. He found a sentry standing by a clump of bushes, and another, one of the Old Guard, lying prone at his feet.

"Malediction!" he whispered. "Who had the daring?"

The man saluted.

"It is Corporal Lebrun, Monsieur. He gave one cry—thus; and I saw him fall. He was hit over the heart at Essling, and only his cartouchier saved him; but he has complained since of an oppression. I think the closeness, the thunder——"

The officer interrupted him:

"That will do. You had no right to leave your post. Return to it."

The soldier saluted again, wheeled, and retreated. De Sainte Croix bent over the fallen man.

"How is it, Lebrun?"

The corporal lay with a ghastly face, his breath

labouring, his chest lifting in spasms. He was not a young man, yet prematurely aged, toughened, grizzled, tanned like old leather in the service of his god. There was a wild, lost look in his eyes which betokened the coming end. He struggled to speak.

“ Lift me up, monsieur, in God’s name ! ”

De Sainte Croix took the livid head on his knee. The posture somewhat eased the fighting heart.

“ Courage, comrade ! This fit will pass with the oppression. Why, I myself feel it—I. When the storm breaks——”

The blue lips caught at the word.

“ When the storm breaks ! What will he have answered ? ”

“ He ? Who ? ” said the young officer.

The dying corporal, twisting in his arms, made an awful gesture towards the Emperor’s tent.

“ As always,” said de Sainte Croix, “ with the cry to victory.”

The other clutched his hand with a grip like madness.

“ I believe it, monsieur. He will have renewed the compact.”

"What compact, my poor friend?"

"With the red man."

De Sainte Croix could hardly catch the answer.

He laughed—men must laugh, though they died for it—and spoke a soothing word. He believed the poor fellow delirious.

"I have laughed too, I have scorned, I have feigned to disbelieve," said Lebrun, thickly and passionately. "I laugh no longer. Marengo, Hohenlinden, Jena, Austerlitz—what mortal brain unassisted could have so added victory to victory, could so, and for so long a time, have held the world's destinies in the hollow of one hand? I am a soldier, monsieur, a simple, uneducated man, and yet I know things and I have seen things that would make the wise falter in their wisdom."

"This red man, amongst others," said the young officer conciliatingly.

A quiver of lightning at the moment glazed the dying face. Great drops stood on it; the fallen cheeks were filling with shadow; the eyeballs shone like porcelain. In spite of himself, a shiver ran down de Sainte Croix's spine. There was certainly something uncanny in the

night, even to war-toughened nerves. Lebrun's voice had sunk to a whisper as he answered :

" Didst thou never hear of the General's proclamation in Egypt to the Ulemas and Shereefs? He stood then on shifting sand—the English sea-captain had just beaten us. A false step, and he were engulfed for ever. And, to gain the people, he told them that their God had sent him to destroy the enemies of Islam and to trample on the cross."

" Policy, Lebrun," said de Sainte Croix, lifting his hand to wipe his own wet forehead. " He never meant it."

" Then why, monsieur, did this blasphemy follow immediately on the visit of the red man? There had been no hint of it before—and afterwards he swore to them that their false bible was the true word."

De Sainte Croix snapped somewhat fretfully :

" This red man? Who the devil is he?"

A shudder quite convulsed the corporal.

" Thou hast spoken it, monsieur."

" A figment of your excited fancy, soldier."

" With these eyes I saw him, monsieur. It was ten years ago. I was on guard in a corridor

of the palace at Cairo, *and there came out of the General's cabinet one who had never gone in.* Little he was, like a child of a hundred years, and he had on a blood-red berrous, and his face was black as a Nubian's. Only at the lips it pulsed with fire, and fire, dim and wavering, travelled under his cheeks. One moment thus he stood—I could have touched him—and, behold! he was a little draped black figure of bronze that stood on a pedestal by a red curtain. It had always been there—I rubbed my eyes——”

“ Voilà la chose ! ”

“ Monsieur, I dared. I listened at the General's door, and I heard him laugh softly to himself—he who never laughs—and he said : ‘ Greet thee, Zamiel ! Ten years I have given thee to make me a god, or our compact is ended ! ’ Monsieur, the ten years are passed, and to-night he stands again, as he stood then, at the parting of the ways.”

A flash, more brilliant than any that had yet shown, weltered and was gone. The dying soldier lifted his head quickly, with a fearful cry:

“ Ne savoir à quel saint se vouer ! I saw

him again—but now, before I fell, I saw the red man again, and he passed into the Emperor's tent ! ”

The thunder followed on his word, with a rolling slam that shook the island.

“ Lebrun ! ” cried the young officer. “ Lebrun ! ”

The head was like a stone in his hands ; he peered down sickly ; the soul of the corporal had been shaken out of him with the crash.

And, even as de Sainte Croix rose, the storm broke, and under cover of it, and of the tearing wind and rain, began the first of those silent movements which were to precipitate the gathered hosts of the French upon the opposite shore—and victory.

A moment later the young man was back at his post, amid a shadowy flurry of equerries and staff officers. All seemed confusion, but it was the kaleidoscopic agitation which falls into place and order. As he stood, the enemy's guns, startled into action, flashed deep and melancholy from the distant blackness, their roar mingling with the thunder's.

It was in an instant of quivering light that, looking down, he was aware of something strange

and red standing by his side. It might have been a child, a dwarf, a cuirassier's scarlet cloak, grotesquely alive. In the momentary blinding darkness which followed it was lost to him. He heard, as his eyes recovered their focus, a measured voice speaking close by :

"I think we have them, M. de Sainte Croix, since I have resolved to renew my compact with Destiny."

He started violently, saluted instinctively. It was the Emperor himself.

"By God's favour, sire," he said.

"Precisely," said the Emperor dryly, and walked away.

LEONORA OF TOLEDO

"FOR the fruit of the blood belongs to those who bring the price of love."

So, but in a less rapt and mystical sense than that in which the holy virgin of Siena had poured out her soul, thought the young Duchess Leonora, wife of Pietro, second son of Cosimo da Medici, Grand Duke of Florence.

The price of love, the price of love! For eleven days she had wept, burning to pay it—indignant, passionate, heart-broken, she had told herself. And now that the altar was ready and the blade bared, what was her desire? Only for mercy—only for life, shameful and abandoned if needs must be, but life on any terms, the least regarded, the most despised. She was so young, so untutored; she had been so led astray by the casuistries of gallantry in this city of profligates. She would confess her sin, plead its extenuations, abase herself before the knees

of the father of her child. That at least existed in pledge of her wifely loyalty; no man else could boast so much of her. She had borne that agony, that rapture, with a pure conscience. Surely the father would not murder the mother of his babe! So monstrous a deed would cry aloud for vengeance even in this place of monsters!

And even while she sat with white face and staring eyes, gnawing a tumbled strand of her beautiful auburn hair, she knew that all the extenuations she could plead were but so many aggravations of her crime; that the reptile she had been forced into marrying had insidiously encouraged her infidelity with this very purpose of ridding himself of her; that all the light and flower of her youth were but incentives to the lustful cruelty of one destitute of compassion and nobility. She was to die, somewhere, somehow; and in all that city she had no one courageous friend to whom to turn, no hope anywhere of refuge or escape. Policy, the policy of the devil in this cursed Gehenna, must turn a deaf ear, a blind eye to her peril. The Duke himself—

She shuddered from the very poison of his

name. The base emotions it recalled robbed death for the moment of its worst terrors, picturing its shadowy arms the sole merciful asylum from memories too dreadful for endurance. Death, no grisly phantom, but the kind mother, lulling to eternal forgetfulness !

‘Ah ! but she was so young, so young !’ She buried her face in her hands, and rocked herself to and fro, moaning.

* * * *

Cosimo, the first of the junior branch of the house of Medici, had come to reign in Florence as absolute Duke in 1537. His wife, Leonora (daughter of Don Pedro de Toledo, Spanish viceroy at Naples), had died twenty-five years later, after having borne him several children, of whom Pietro was the second son. Within a month or two of her death the Duke was involved in an intrigue with a second Leonora de Toledo, niece of the first, a beautiful child who had been placed at the Tuscan Court under her aunt’s care. The circumstances of the liaison being revealed caused such a scandal that Cosimo, in order to quiet it, married the girl to his son Pietro, a libertine of the sickliest odour. The inevitable result followed in that city of furious

passions and perverted morals. The young wife, despised and neglected by her husband, robbed, moreover, of her self-respect, accepted the usual *cavaliere-servente*—in this case one Alessandro Gagi—more, it would seem, out of pique than inclination. At least, when, the flirtation having been noted, Gagi, privately warned of its danger, had elected to resolve a poignant difficulty by retiring into a monastery, Leonora had had no difficulty in transferring her affections to an object more daring, or less discreet, than her melancholy new-fledged young Capuchin. The fresh fancy was a youthful blood of Saint-Étienne, and this time it was a case of genuine passion into which she rushed headstrong. She may have affected to believe that indifference was the worst thing she had to fear from her husband ; if she did, she lied to herself, as women will when their desire runs ahead of their prudence. The case of Alessandro Gagi was her sufficient admonition. The dog was not asleep because his eyes were shut.

The lovers met ; and this time there was no hint of espionage vouchsafed. But quite suddenly St. Étienne, as we must call him, was ordered off to the Island of Elba. The pretext

for his banishment was a fatal duel in which he had lately been engaged with a young nobleman, Francesco Ginori; the real object, undoubtedly, was the procuring of incriminating evidence of the liaison in the shape of written correspondence. St. Étienne, recklessly enamoured, was not long in providing this, or the spies of the husband in intercepting it. The guilty lover was seized, brought back privately to the prison of the Bargello, and there at dead of night strangled. The news of his death was conveyed to Leonora, whether in malice or sympathy, by Francesco, her brother-in-law; and for eleven days thereafter she wept, heedless of consequences, abandoned to her grief. She dreamed in that time that she had the stuff of heroism in her; and her illusionment only came to vanish utterly with the withdrawal of the envoy who, on the twelfth day, had brought her a message from her husband.

This envoy's voice, his figure, each as chill, as precise, as faultless as the other, still vividly haunted her as she sat. Not a word or tone of his had been ill-considered; not a hair had been out of place in his little pointed black

beard, which had lain upon a ruff like biscuit china. His cold, exquisite hands, his jerkin and trunk hose of white silver-sprigged satin, his ivory sword-scabbard—all had been so many graduated harmonies in a picture of icy perfection. He had looked a man built out of frost ; and from the heart of frost had come his words, keen, dispassionate, killing :

“ His Grace, Madonna, much concerning himself with a distemper into which he hears you reported to be fallen, entreats your company at his Villa of Cafaggiodo, where he is in hopes the silence and the sweeter air will restore to you your health.”

And she had looked at him, with a sudden catch at her heart, though the flame of defiance in her still flickered.

“ I thank you, Messer. For when is my doom pronounced ? ”

Whereat the envoy had raised one white hand ineffably.

“ Alas, Madonna ! Is our dear prince’s tender consideration so hurtful ? Even now he waits to welcome you,”

Then she had put out entreating arms to him.

“ Messer—a little time to prepare—to say

goodbye. I have a son, Messer, a very little child. Look, this is the Vecchio, is it not—the Duke's palace? I am quite alone in my corner of it, caged, shunned like a leper, yet my every exit from it is guarded. Give me this night in which to part seemingly with all I have left to love on earth."

His laugh had sounded like the tinkle of ice on glass.

"Love? You wilfully postpone it, madam. Yet will I venture to enlarge upon my credentials to the extent your Grace demands. To-morrow——"

"I will deliver myself without fail to the sacrifice, Messer."

And, with a patient, deprecating shrug, in which shoulders, eyebrows, and lips were all included, he had made his profound obeisance, and left her. And then!

It came upon her like a stroke, electric, instant, agonising out of numbness. She did not want to die; she had only been tricking herself in the trappings of tragedy; like the spoiled beauty she was, she had believed herself irresistible though playing with devils; and each day's grace had but confirmed her in her

wilful self-delusion. And now at last she was awake and mad with fear—confessed now to herself for the unheroic creature of selfishness and vanity which her deeds had already proclaimed her to the world.

Passion, indeed, often speaks big until it finds itself trapped. Its artificial heat is very susceptible to chills. Then, in proportion as it has burned furious, is the abjectness of its relapse. I speak of it as an emotion apart from love. This poor Leonora, in her craven frenzy, condoned in her mind the offences of the monster in whose relentless grasp she now felt herself writhing. Her leaning towards him, her desire to propitiate, was like a lust. She would swear herself his creature, his sympathiser, his fellow-passionist, if only he would accept and spare her as such. Do not blame her over-harshly. The spirit crazed with fear of darkness has no volition but towards the light. Moreover, the catalogue of the deadly sins was much confused in her time, and some crimes which in our day would be held unpardonable were avowed pleasantries. The butterfly bred to carrion is not easily weaned to honey—our own fair Purple-Emperor is an example—and grapes fattened on

bullocks' blood wither deprived of it. What wonder that this poor lovely creature, bred on corruption, confessed her tastes vitiated? It was life she wanted, and, at the last, even with Pietro da Medici for her boon-fellow. The woman was debased; yet the mother remained. It had been already dusk when the envoy withdrew. Now, with streaming eyes and labouring bosom, she hurried to spend her last night on earth by the cradle of her little Cosimo.

* * * * *

With dawn came hope, came the jocund reassurance of the sun, of the familiar greetings and services and customs. It seemed impossible that tragedy could be lurking behind that kindly commonplace. Leonora's spirits rose with the morning, heightened with the glowing day. Had the conquering glory of her beauty served her hitherto so implicitly to fail her now? If jealousy were at the bottom of this resentment, she carried the sweetest antidote to it in her bosom. Imploring eyes, lovely submission and lovely solicitation—so she acted the part of a prostitute in her soul, and almost counted the hours to the end.

In the late afternoon she was informed, un-

asked, that a carriage and escort awaited her in the court by the Via de Leone. Half hysterical, she sought her little boy for the last time, and her tears ran salt over his face as she kissed him.

"Love mummia, bambinetto, always, always!"

It was the attitude of her escort that first struck a chill into her, and caused a declension in her high spirits. They may have been ignorant of her purposed fate; but she was under a ban, and they were under orders. These, it was evident, included uncommunicativeness, rigid surveillance, impassive force. The Villa Cafaggiodo lay at some distance beyond the walls in a lonely country. The young Duchess employed every artifice to delay the journey, now a purchase she must make, now a friend she must speak to, now a church she must visit. She was never denied; she was humoured—and watched—in everything. A subtler treatment had, perhaps, allayed her alarms entirely, as it was evidently the object of the escort to evade attention or suspicion; but these common minds had not the *savoir faire* to throw off the weight of responsibility under

which they laboured. At length they left the city behind, and came into the open country—an abandonment which the girl had dreaded unspeakably, and resisted as long as possible.

And here Madama must alight to pick the wayside flowers—for the month was July—and again, and yet again when she saw one more beautiful than the rest; so that dusk was beginning to fall, windless and melancholy, when they came in sight of the villa. But there was no thought of flowers in her soul, then or at any time; and the loveliest of all the blossoms lay crushed in her little hand when at last the carriage rolled into the courtyard of the Villa Cafaggiodo, and the attendants came round to the door to help her alight.

She looked up at the frowning portal, at the lifeless galleries, and shrank back.

" My lord does not entertain ? " she whispered.

" It is his will to be alone, Madonna," they answered low.

Hardly conscious of her limbs, swaying a little, she mounted the steps, and saw an open door before her. Standing there, as in a fearful dream, she heard a sudden sound below, and started and turned. The carriage, the

escort, were all in retreat, returning by the road they had come. She tried to call to them—her dry throat would not articulate ; she made a panic move as if to descend, and paused again. They had closed and bolted the gates behind them ; she was left quite alone and unprotected in that deserted place.

There was no voice of anything but a little garrulous fountain, which giggled and choked in the courtyard. The cold, grey house-front rose above her ; behind and to either side the cypresses reared their inky minarets against an empty sky. In the spaces between, the bushes and flowering shrubs were already clouds of impenetrable shadow, palpitating with suggestion. What might not be beyond or within them, watching for her descent—eyes, horrible eyes ! With a shudder she turned to the door, and saw the vast spaces of the vestibule, melancholy, cavernous, waiting to engulf her. But not a sound came from them, or from anywhere. The place seemed wholly vacant and deserted.

Hush ! a whisper—a footstep creeping on the stones of the court below. Without pausing to look or convince herself, she fled into the great hall, and found herself at the foot of the stair-

case, breathing in a mortal fear, clutching at the balustrade for support. A faint glow from the dying day smeared the marble walls, and illuminated the limbs of a dozen statues as if with phosphorescence. But the pits of blackness between, more dense in consequence, were dreadfully potential of evil, and, half swooning, she turned to the staircase as her only resource. There was a room above—a room she knew and had slept in—and thither, as to her one ark of refuge in that mad flight, she instinctively made. If she could only reach it before she died of terror !

She was there, had put out a shaking hand to part the tapestry on the wall, when something, unfamiliar to her even in her blind agitation, made her shrink back with a shock like death. She knew the woven picture—Herodias's daughter, and the dark arm of the executioner holding the bleeding head over the charger. But now the poised hand seemed empty—the head had run to a point—in a sudden sick fascination she peered forward to examine it.

God in heaven ! the arm was actual and living ; the fingers gripped a dagger !

And, even as she uttered a little whining cry,

"Pero! per pietà!" she saw a mad gleam at the crevice, and the arm struck down.

Her scream was still echoing through the empty house as a grinning, soft-snarling beast parted the arras, and, leaping over the prostrate body, turned and bent gloatingly to view it. His poniard stood buried to the hilt in the soft flesh of the shoulder-blade.

"Pietro's tooth!" he shrieked; "Pietro's tooth!" His laugh reeled and babbled among the galleries as if scores of invisible feet were suddenly running down to the scene of the crime.

He paused, he listened; with an awful look he suddenly cast himself on his knees by the murdered child, and, raising his bloody hands, besought, in a shaking voice and with tears streaming down his cheeks, Heaven's pardon for his crime, vowing, in expiation of it, never to marry again.

With moans and sobs he then raised the poor body, silent to his remorse as to his hate, and, passionately kissing the lips, grown desirable to him only in death, with his own hands laid it in the coffin he had ready prepared for it in the very chamber to which the living soul had fled, in thought, for refuge.

That same night it was secretly conveyed to Florence, and buried in the Church of San Lorenzo. The murderer married Beatrice de Menesser seventeen years later. But, no doubt, by then, as a great romancer remarked, he had not only forgotten his vow, but that any reason had ever existed for his making one. God, in mediæval Italy, was credited with as short a memory as man, and with a much more amiable credulity.

CHARLES IX

“SCATTER them, scatter them ere the Death cometh! They are like black crows seeking carrion, and where they watch some soul is doomed to hell. From afar they spy their prey, and on the roof they gather, waiting till it fall.”

These words of a fanatic priest, denouncing the Huguenots, were for ever in his brain from the moment of the rising of the dark bird. They had rung in its haunted corridors before, had he known it; but it was the rising of the bird which had doomed it to their eternal possession. It had happened in this way:

With the first weak breaking of dawn, three pallid, guilty figures came stealing into a little chamber of the Louvre which overlooked the *basse-cour* notched into that angle of the palace which faced towards St. Germain l'Auxerrois. They were the King, his mother, and his brother the Duc D'Anjou. An unnatural quiet brooded

over the city. It suggested the paralysed horror of a sleeper awakened to sudden consciousness of some ghastly presence in his room. They stood, in a little quaking group, peering from the window upon the courtyard and the quay of the Louvre, both in seeming dark and empty, and in seeming uncannily close beneath. What if some tigerish bound were to clear that interval, and they, the gloating Cæsars of the arena, be made the sport of their own blood-lust? The King's hand twitched on the musketoon he carried.

The river, a livid tongue, lapped up the blackness ; the wind fell all in a moment, like a shot bird, and rustling its wings a little on the pavement, died and gave place to silence utter and profound. Suddenly in the distance a pistol rattled out.

It was followed by the bells. At first it was only the tocsin of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, the shattering boom of the great bronze dome shouting death from its tower. But soon other bells took up the tale, the signal leaping on from height to height, as warning beacons are fired, and in the same breath the streets were full of armed men. They seemed to spring from the ground,

like the dragon men of Thebes, and to fall as instantly to slaughter and destruction. Every second they gathered, and roaring and sweeping on, crashed in the last defences of sleep and woke the city to pandemonium. And then came the King's madness.

He had fought against it to the end. Even in the little ghostly chamber his soul had risen, in a final revolt of sanity, against the merciless policy which had set itself deliberately to undermine his reason. But he had not the strength to escape. His hand, with the dagger in it, had been held from first to last by his mother Catherine, as mothers of a human mould direct the little stumbling hands of their children in forming letters with a pen ; and not to him was due the significance of the characters which that bloody stylus had written upon the wall. His old nurse, indeed, whom next to Marie Touchet and her child he most dearly loved, was a staunch Huguenot. And he kept the wit to save her ; but he could not save the good Admiral Coligny, whom he honoured. His mother had her way with him at last, and was herself panic-struck by the fury of the blaze she had fuelled.

Having once tasted blood, he cried for it,

for more and more until the gutters choked ; insulted the fallen who appealed to him for mercy ; decoyed the partisans of Condé and Navarre into his toils with cunning messages, and chuckled to see them butchered in the Court below. The roar, the rushing tumult of the quays, the yells of the pursuers, the screams of agony of the smitten, the bells and the guns, all danced in his mad veins and wrought him to frenzy. He outscreamed the victims ; he fired at the corpses floating in the river ; he laughed and stared alternately. Once, early in the business, a boatful of Huguenots, coming across the water from the opposite faubourg, was emptied out in a twinkling, and its human load dragged for slaughter across the stones. They had believed it all an affair of the Guisea, and had come to beg protection of the King. The King ! what shadow of justification was theirs ? A King of shreds and patches ! He cursed their monstrous credulity ; he pointed his piece and fired straight into the breast of the tallest fool of them all, who had fallen on his back on the stones immediately below. With the sound of his shot a great black bird rose straight from out the dead man, and flapping upwards with

solemn wings, disappeared over the roof of the Louvre. The King threw down his musquetoon, and stood staring.

They said that it was a raven, its master's constant companion, his pet, his mascot, which he seldom let from his bosom when he went abroad. The King did not contradict them ; the mortal distress in him found even some solace in the fable. But in his deep heart he knew that the apparition had been none other than the black soul of the Huguenot, and that it had flown to settle on the roof, to watch for the passing of another soul, his own, already doomed by it to hell. "*Ere the death cometh!*" From that moment, as he believed, he was marked down ; and the thought of how he might elude the bird on the roof never left him. If he could only circumvent it, he might yet be saved.

He was sitting with his suite, days after the massacre, in a chamber of the palace, when a sudden uproar overhead startled them all. It was evening, but the tapers were not yet lit. The sound was hideous—a sound as of a multitude of lost spirits screaming and blaspheming in the upper air. It was the eve of St. Bartholo-

mew all over again, the pent-up terrors of it broken loose and re-enacted. Even in their graves, it seemed, the ghosts could not be held down, but had burst their bloody cerements and risen in an uncontrollable agony of memory. Where would it end? Where could it? There was no mowing down spirits by sword and fire ; they had the upper hand now, and the minds and reasons of the living were their ghastly prey. Rising, as they looked at one another with grey faces, the group one and all sought the open air.

What was it? A black cloud of crows, no more ; a flock in constant motion, circling, settling and resettling—calling for a second glut of victims. They had learned to imitate the voices of the massacre, screeching, sobbing, praying—a horrible thing. They were the souls of the murdered, ministers of hell, come to await their turn on the roof. The King said no word, but that same night, after he had slept a little from exhaustion, he rose suddenly in a horror too great for speech, and sat staring and listening. His good old nurse hurried to him ; he whispered to her, Did she not hear it? Those haunted chambers of his brain were full of wild tramp-

ings, and execrations, and the hubbub of a mad conflict. He declared there was a riot in the town, that he would have his guard dispatched to end it, that he wanted no more murder. They returned in a little to say that the whole city slept peaceful in the moonlight, though it was true that the air was curiously agitated, as by the hot vapour above an oven. He dismissed them, and dropped his weary head upon his nurse's bosom. He was her child again, her nursling, her little frightened dreamer waking in the dark.

"They shall not touch thee, Charlot," she whispered. "Thou didst not mean it, thou."

For seven nights was this repeated, the noises, the horror, the collapse; and then the crows departed. Like a black cloud they gathered in a moment, and drifted away northwards to wait for the coming of the Armada.

"Are they all gone?" asked the pallid King. He would trust to nobody but his nurse. She went out, and looked along the ridge of the roof, and returned.

"All but one," she said; "and he is hurt belike, and will not last out the night."

"That is the one," he answered, "and he

will last out the night of my life. O, nurse ! he waiteth for my soul, and, so he marketh its passage hence, he will seize it, and I am damned for ever."

" That then shall he never do, Charlot," she exclaimed ; " for I will have him shot here and now."

The King shook his head ; and, indeed, he expressed what he knew. The crow was never shot ; the bird seemed to bear a charmed life ; but all of a sudden one day it was gone.

To say that he breathed again would imply but a qualified respite, inasmuch as his every breath was a pain to him. Through all that autumn and through all the ensuing year he was a dying man, and in the May that followed he lay down on his bed for the last time. At the end he spoke little but with the shapes that haunted him. He lay on his couch, wrapped in a robe that, for all its lightness, it hurt his chest to lift. He suffered intolerably, both mentally and physically. His faithful little wife, whose love he had neglected, came and sat by his side, silent, with large haunted eyes, and prayed for him, and wept secretly, and blew

her little red nose softly to explain her need for a handkerchief. And Marie Touchet came with their child, and wondered how, at the last, the wreck of sweet royalty differed so little from all other human wrecks. He made his peace with these, but he could not with himself. The vision of the crow was eternally in his mind ; his atom of trust in the strong faith of his nurse was his solitary grain of comfort in a world of terrors. He floated in crimson streams, and rose choking from them, foul and horrible. "Ah, nurse," he sighed perpetually, "what blood and what murders ! "

She was always ready with the faith, with the triumphant word that touched like a healing judgment.

"Let them that called the feast answer for the reckoning."

And so the hours crept on to the end.

One day, as she watched alone beside him, he fell asleep. He had made his testament that morning, had committed the sore destinies of his kingdom to his mother and his brother of Navarre, and, exhausted with the effort, had fallen back on his pillow, breathing out the last words he was ever to utter on earth :

" I thank my God that I leave no male child behind me to wear my crown ! "

It was as still as death. The sunshine came through the open window, and threw a patch of light on the floor. As the tired nurse sat watching this, half hypnotised by the glow, of a sudden she saw it blotted by a soft shadow. She raised her eyes quickly, and there on the windowsill, black and motionless, was perched a great crow.

She did not even start ; but she turned her head and looked at the King's face. The sign of the awful change was overspreading it ; the nostrils pulsed ; the fingers below picked feebly at the silken robe. In a few moments, she saw, he would be gone. She rose quickly, and moved across to the window. The dark bird never stirred. There seemed a deep, unearthly movement in the sleek gloom of its eyes, and that was all. It was absorbed in watching, but not her. She flung out her hands, and caught it in a grip of iron.

" Charlot ! " she cried, " my babe ! Die while I hold him ! "

There was a rustle behind her, a sudden cry, a drumming as of feet running, speeding from

the earth and life ; and then all fell silent. But not the bird. He leaped and battled in her hands. His beak was an inky dagger, his talons rakes of steel. His screams seared her heart—they seemed uttered in it ; his pinions beat on her brain. But she held on, driving in her nails, her teeth set and her resolution. She felt the blood pouring down her wrists, and she cared no whit, so long as she could keep the horror from pursuing her nursling. And presently the struggles slackened, and she felt the bird die in her hands.

Holding it thus away from her, she went to the window and flung it forth. It dropped without sound, like a shadow that had suddenly been blown from her brain. She looked at her hands —they were unhurt ; at the King—he lay with a smile on his dead lips.

THE KING'S CHAMPION

"AND now, schentelmen, about that little inzident at the goronation?"

It was his Majesty King William III. who spoke, crumpled back into his big chair. His eyes, bright as a sparrow's, peered from the nest of an enormous wig. His small, shrewd features, diminutive frame, and legs like cribbage-pegs, were the least adapted, one might have thought, to carry the extravagant vesture of his day. He appeared, indeed, to be always lost in it, and as if just on the point of finding his way out. Yet the clothes of a Daniel Lambert would hardly have sufficed for his spirit.

The Marquis of Halifax, his Lord Privy Seal, smiled, and shrugged his stout shoulders deprecatingly. There were four others present in this his Majesty's somewhat melancholy little Cabinet at Whitehall : Lord Denby, his President of the

Council, and three solemn Dutch mynheers—D'Auverquerque, Schomberg, and Zuylestein, who had been appointed respectively the King's Masters of Horse, Ordnance, and the Robes. These last were all as grave as mustard-pots, and the subject, long-expected and broached at last, made them graver.

It turned upon an incident, slight in itself, significant only in its context, which had struck a discordant note in the tremendous ceremonial of the day before. When the King's Champion, riding in by the great door of Westminster, had cast his gage upon the floor, offering to prove in person upon the body of whomsoever should challenge the right of King William and Mary his Queen to reign as sovereign inheritors of the realm that that same dissident lied in his throat and was a false traitor, a most unexpected response had followed. A little old lady, dressed in a watered tabby and mittens, and having large spectacles on her nose and a stiff three-storied *commode* of lace perched on her white hair, had darted from among the spectators, and, whipping up the steel glove, had returned it to the Champion with a whispered word or two, and then fairly run away, melting into the crowd

which thronged about the entrance before any one could think of interposing.

The affair had caused a momentary stir, and even a titter, instantly subdued to the august occasion, as Sir Charles Dymoke, the Champion, had ridden up the Hall, his face as red as fire, to deliver and re-deliver his cartel.

But it had not passed unobserved by the King himself or by those around him. Extinguished as he had appeared to be in his panoply of purple and ermine and embroidered scarlet, looking, as he had risen at the great table to drink his Champion's health, for all the world like a little over-swaddled Greek Icon elevated against a background of glittering stained glass, his diminutive Majesty had had an ear and an eye for everything within the longest range of either. His birdlike optics, bright as twin buttons sunk amid that pomp of raiment, had been fully cognisant of the little episode, and had watched the after-approach of his Champion with an unwinking interest, which had seemed to concentrate itself to such a challenging focus on the flushed face of the knight as he came near, that that doughty Paladin had fallen into confusion and had something botched the busi-

ness of the toast that followed. However, he had managed, though crestfallen, to retire presently with sufficient aplomb and his requisite of a golden beaker ; and there for the moment the matter had ended.

“ Sir Charles Dymoke,” began Lord Halifax——

“ Who is dat man ? ” interrupted the King.
“ Vat is his title to the bost ? ”

“ It is claimed by him, sire,” answered the peer, “ in his right of the Manor of Scrivelsby. The office was originally deputed, I understand, to Sir Richard de Marmyon by the Conqueror, and hath descended by virtue of that tenure to this day. Sir Charles is its legitimate representative.”

“ Well,” said the King, “ broudice him before us.”

“ Why,” said the Marquis feebly, “ that is the odd thing. Sir Charles is nowhere to be found.”

The three Dutch mynheers uttered guttural sounds in their throats, and looked at one another and at the King significantly.

His Majesty’s brows knotted.

“ Dat is very vonny,” he said. “ Not to be vound, mein vrent ? ”

" It has been ascertained, your Majesty," said Lord Denby wearily—he was a picked white bone of a man, with no stomach and yet a perpetual stomach-ache, which naturally aggrieved him—" that Sir Charles rode, immediately after the ceremony, to the ' Cock ' hostelry in Tothill Street, whence, having disengaged himself of his panoply, he continued his way to the riding-school of one Dobney, near Islington, where he delivered up his horse and disappeared. Since when he has neither returned to his inn nor vouchsafed the least token of his existence."

The King considered the matter very glumplily within himself. It appeared a trifle; yet trifles might easily be under-estimated in the existing state of things. The incident was something or nothing—a mere meaningless frolic, or a challenge to his title bearing a certain significance. The land swarmed with Jacobites of more or less power and prominence. What if one of them were to meet and defeat his Champion? How, in that event, would his claim stand? What was the procedure? It was an odd contingency, and he put it rather acridly to my Lord Privy Seal.

" He drow de gage ; anodder agcept it ; dey

vight ; my man vall. Vat is to vollow ? " he demanded.

" Ja ! Dat is vat strike idself into me bom-bom," said Schomberg the warrior.

Lord Halifax smiled rather sheepishly. He was a large, tolerant soul of sixty, repudiating all sentiment and subject to much. He had been called the " Trimmer "; but, then, no man of humour can ever be a man of convictions. Kind, witty, and cynical, he was yet so fond of Reason that he could make a fool of himself with her. He was even worked upon to do so in the present case.

" There is positively no precedent, sire," he said. " To my certain knowledge the thing has never happened before."

" Bot zhould it jost zo happen ? " insisted his master.

" Ach ! " said D'Auverquerque penetratingly.

" With deference, sire," said his lordship, " is it not something premature to assume any hostile intent in the matter ? The good lady——"

" Posh ! " put in the King irritably. " Neither goot nor lady."

" Zo it strike itself into mein head bom-bom," said Schomberg.

"Dat dress vas a masgerade," said William—"a vact, we zhould haf gonsidered, blain to the stupidest indelligence."

"Certainly, certainly," agreed Lord Halifax nervously.

"Vell, sir—vat den?"

"Ach! vat den?" demanded D'Auverquerque cunningly.

"I vill dell your lordship," said Schomberg. "Dere was a vine swordsman gonzealed under dose bettigoats."

The Lord Privy Seal, considering the subject, woke to a certain trepidation.

"It is impossible," he admitted, "to avoid attaching a measure of importance to the affair, or to gauge its consequences should it be carried through. Surely Sir Charles could not be so foolish as to risk a serious encounter? But he must be found and warned at all costs."

His mood communicated itself to the others. The matter began to assume with them all an increasingly sinister aspect. Majesty was not yet so safe on its throne that omens could be disregarded. The King, prompt and tireless, for all his sickly constitution, in business—the little man who was to regain for England her reputa-

tion for workaday sanity—had yet, at this beginning, a vast estate to recover from chaos, and his path was beset with perils. The country was still in two minds, and each distracted; a trifle might upset the balance. Deliberating in this sort, a species of hysteria communicated itself after a time from one to another of the little Council, until it definitely came to perceive in the episode a daring ruse for bringing about a reaction in popular sentiment. What if the meeting were actually to occur, and the Champion to be overthrown? It was not to be doubted that the event would have been provided for, and those engaged in bringing it about forearmed. Defeat might result in riot, and riot in revolution. Arrived at that pitch of the debate, the six gentlemen, including his Majesty, were all speaking together in considerable agitation.

It was the personality of the mysterious Mohock, once convicted of masculinity, which most exercised their minds. He was certainly an individual of importance, as so momentous a mission would hardly have been entrusted to a nonentity. But who? A dozen names suggested themselves. Berwick, Tyrconnel, Lord Henry

Fitzjames, the ex-monarch's natural son, Marlborough himself, and others. It was Zuylestein, speaking for the first and last time, who finally put the spark to all this accumulating tow. "Vat," he said, "if it is James himself, zegretly gom over from St. Germains and resolved upon venturing dis bigduresque abbeal to de public?"

"Bom-bom!" said Schomberg.

He rose, Halifax rose, they all rose, and faced the King.

"Ik dank U, mijnheer," said his Majesty; "it is a very blausible suggestion."

The words were equivalent to a bid to action. The Council broke up hurriedly, and within an hour the Dutch troops had been beaten to arms, the militia called out, the magistrates warned, and the whole city placed under a surveillance of the most searching description. It was at this momentous pass, when panic was in the air, that Sir Charles Dymoke walked unconcerned into the "Cock" tavern, in Tothill Street, and was immediately arrested by the guard set to watch that hostelry, and conveyed in a state of complete stupefaction to Whitehall. He was taken at once before the King sitting in Council.

"Vere haf you been?" demanded William sternly.

"Your Majesty!" gasped the Champion, a sturdy gallant of middle age.

"Answer, sir," said the monarch—"and vidout equivocation."

"I have been with a friend," stammered Sir Charles, all amazement.

"Ach!" exclaimed his Majesty sarcastically.
"The vrow, vas it, vat returnt you your gage
in the Hall yesterday?"

"Certainly not, sire," said the Champion, the flush of outrage on his cheek.

"Not?" said the King. "Who vas she, den,
dat woman?"

"The wife of Dobney, the horse-tamer, sire."

"The vife—vat! Vat had she said to you?"

"She said, your Majesty, ' Didn't I warn you
not to throw it down in front of her nose, unless
you want her to kneel and pick it up? '"

"She? Who?"

"The mare, sire. She performs at Islington."

"Your Majesty," said the Lord Privy Seal very softly, "shall we thank Sir Charles and proceed to the order of the day?"

"Bom-bom!" said Schomberg under his breath.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

“WHAT was that?”

“Madam, it was the snow falling from the roof.”

“Methought it was a footstep.”

“No, madam.”

“There, heard you it not—the sound of some one running?”

“But a rat behind the wainscot. Your Grace’s ears deceive you.”

“What, for ever? Poor ears, so curst to lies and flattery!”

“Your Highness is overwrought.”

“Will some one speak the truth to me before I die? God, how my bones ache! No step? Go look in the gallery, child.”

The girl to whom she spoke, leaving her embroidery-frame, stepped lightly to the door, glanced this way and that, and returned. Her young eyes shone humid between pity and awe.

"No, indeed, madam," she said low. "The corridor is empty."

The Queen, without answering, crossed to the window and stood staring from it. It looked upon the privy garden of Whitehall, now one carpet of quiet, sad-coloured snow with the river ruled across its far end like an inky mourning border. A motionless fog brooded over the trees and over the palace buildings trooped to right and left. There seemed no sign of life anywhere.

Within, a glare of fire burning on a great stone-hooded hearth dashed the wainscoting with red, and crimsoned the hands and faces of the figures in the panels of tapestry, and touched the gold groining of the ceiling and the fresh rushes on the floor with smears like blood. The old eyes, gazing so fixedly across the snow, seemed streaked with the same ruddy hue, but reflected from another and an inward fire. As to the first, she was ever disdainfully insensible to cold, this gaunt, strong old Tudor woman.

Two ladies-in-waiting, a mother and her daughter, had their places by the hearth, where they embroidered together, the former seated, the child bending over. They were the Queen's

only attendants for the moment, since her Majesty was in that tortured frame of mind when her own sole company was but less terrible to her than the thought of an officious suite, veiling curiosity under devotion. Human neighbourhood, silent, tactful, unobtrusive, was the balm her torn soul most needed ; any ostentatious sympathy would have maddened her. She could abandon herself to herself beside this gentle pair, as if they were no more than inarticulate animals —wistful dumb affections on which she could lean her voluble heart, certain of their unconscious understanding.

Now the younger lady, returning to her place, stood awe-struck a moment, then bent and whispered to her mother : “ O, madam, the Tower gun ! How shall we close her Grace’s ears to it ? ”

The Queen, hearing the whisper but not its import, started, and, with a deep flurried sigh, turned round. The wild tumult of thoughts in her mind found expression in detached and broken questions, abstractions, self-communings.

“ ‘ All wounds have scars but that of fantasy, all affections their relenting but that of woman-kind.’ Who writ those words ? Not the mutinous

boy. 'Twas Raleigh—he that saw us like Dian, the gentle wind blowing the hair from our face. Essex never spoke such balm. He was no courtier—the worse for him. Am I like Dian?"

The elder lady had arisen hurriedly, and stood, her daughter clinging to her arm, to answer to the voice, which appeared to have addressed her.

"Yes, madam," she whispered low.

"He never flattered, I say," went on the Queen. "He was too honest—the devil damn honesty! What day is it?"

"Your Highness," was the tremulous answer, "it is the twenty-fifth day of February."

She had known it well enough. All night within her haunted brain the horror of this coming day had brooded—this ghastly morning when on Tower Hill the young Earl of Essex—he was but thirty-four—was to pay the penalty of his madness. She stood staring before her, like one tranced.

"Never flattered," she repeated—"a bad policy where a woman reigns. The twenty-fifth, is it? Let us know if my Lord of Essex sends or writes."

"Yes, madam—O, yes, indeed!"

The girl, leaning to her mother, buried her pale face in her shoulder.

"Hush!" whispered the Queen; "was not that a step?"

"Indeed, madam, I cannot hear a sound."

"A stubborn, relentless dog!" muttered the Queen hoarsely. "Let the axe convince him. He will see clearer being dead—no longer dub my mind as crooked as my body; learn that the soul's glory waxeth with the years, striving to slough its vesture, like a snake. A fool, that cannot penetrate that crackling veil, and see, other than a boy, how Truth abhors externals. Raleigh is older; Raleigh can look deeper. Shall I not be Dian still to him?"

She faced her frightened witnesses with the enormous challenge—an old, arid, charmless woman of sixty-eight. Her withered, clay-white face was latticed with countless wrinkles; her nose was high and pinched; her thin, bloodless lips parted to show a ruin of blackened teeth—little spoiled and broken gravestones recording dead memories. Her gullet pursed; her eyes were bloodshot; the red periwig on her poll glowed like a dull flame over expiring ashes. Even her sloven dress betrayed the sickness of her spirit.

"Yes, indeed, madam," said the mother.

" You lie ! " cried Elizabeth fiercely. " He is false like the rest. His eyes betray his lips. Their love-light is the gilding on my crown. When he looks beneath I see mine image in them, an old and loveless woman—barren, and old, and loveless. Do you not hear my heart cry? It turns on a dry axle. O, I would give my queenhood to weep! So utterly alone —no child, no heir, no hope. They say that Charles of Valois wasted and died of poison. What could he expect? Was he not a prince and curst to flattery? "

She strode up and down once or twice in intolerable anguish.

" Truth ! " she cried—" truth ! And yet when it was mine at last, I turned and struck it down."

" Not truth, your Grace, but jealousy," ventured the trembling lady.

" Jealousy ! " exclaimed the Queen, stopping suddenly. She stared at the speaker, her breath falling from hard to soft. " Was he jealous, think you? "

" O ! madam," said the other, " is it not thy player, Master Shakespeare, that calleth jealousy ' green-eyed,' like as with sour bile that clouds the vision. The distempered speak dis-

tempered thoughts, and often turn the most against their most-beloved. I count it green-eyed jealousy with him because he saw your Highness so distorted—not to extenuate the grievous crimes upon which his passions launched him. O, pardon me, madam ! ”

The Queen stood with her eyes still fixed upon the speaker, but it was evident that their vision took no heed of her, though her ears regarded the import of her speech.

“ Jealous ! ” she said, with a tremulous sigh. “ Mayhap like a silly quean I gave him cause, sporting with my troth-ring till it rolled into the well. He was too sure and bold, forgetting who had lifted him, and who could cast him down. But, jealous ? Does not his hair curl sweetly on his forehead, child ? ”

“ O, madam ! Your Grace ! ”

“ And his eyes so frank and fearless. Fear ! He knows it not, the rash and headstrong fool ! To think to overbear us !—teach our displeasure a lesson ! O, a venture once too often ! Because he can boast a strain of royal blood in his veins to dare to lift his head at us ! to stamp, and cry : ‘ Now, madam, do you hear me ? ’ or ‘ I would have it thus, or thus and thus.’

Such presumption ! And yet to see the pretty lord—his lip thrust out in scorn of sycophancy—a man of men, brave, honest, generous, and a fool."

"Rash and foolish indeed, your Highness."

"Those are but virtues in reverse. Had he no cause to doubt the love that made him but to ruin ? "

"I cry your Grace's mercy."

"What for ? "

"The ruin followed on the treachery."

"Was he a traitor ? "

"O, Madam ! did he not curry favour with the King of Scotland, and plot and league to win him the succession ? "

"Yes, he's a traitor."

"Your Grace forgive me."

"And I'm a woman."

"Madam ! "

"At the last I yield him all my pride and self-will. He hath so much of me, 'twere idle to reserve that little. Who is that coming ? "

" 'Twas but the wind in the corridor, Madam."

"I swear I heard him."

"No, Madam."

"Pride ! Will he not meet us so far—but

to crave our clemency? He knows the way, and, not taking it, must die. What o'clock is it? O, God, he shall not die! Send for my lord Keeper; have horses ready. Hush! he's coming! Should I not know his footfall?"

She drew herself erect and away; a flush came to her withered cheek; she was the Queen again, aloof, haughty, self-contained. The two terrified women, shrunk together into the shadows by the hearth, saw her eyes gaze into vacancy, heard her lips address some apparition beyond their ken:

"What imports this visit, my Lord of Essex? Who gave you leave to come? Our Constable of the Tower shall be roundly questioned, trust to us. What! are you so pale at last to meet offended majesty? Will you not speak? Will you not pray the mercy you have abused in us too long? A viper in our bosom—O, my lord, that loved and trusted you! What can we think or say, God help us! But we will hear what is to hear. So pale?—the sickness of the stones hath chilled thy fiery blood. Why, I would have come to you, you know well, if you had sent it. Why did you not send it—prouder than thy Queen? Where is the ring? Give it me.

O, I have waited, dear my love—have waited dying for this token. Speak—utter one word of sorrow, and I will forgive thee. Aye, kneel so and bow thy comely head——”

A burning log on the hearth fell with a crash and a spurt of flame; a shrill agonised cry broke from the lips of the Queen; she flung her hands before her eyes:

“ O, God in heaven ! The falling head ! They are killing my love ! ”

Weeping and trembling, the two women crept from their corner. At that instant a dull boom, coming from down the river, shook the glass of the casement. The Queen dropped her hands.

“ What was that ? ” she crowed. Her face was all distorted.

“ Your Majesty ! ”

“ What was that, I say ? My Lord of Essex ! He was here but now ! Where is he ? ”

“ In heaven, by God’s mercy, madam. It was the Tower gun.”

The Queen sank down moaning where she stood.

JANE SHORE

IT was a bitter Sunday in January, 1484. A little dry snow fell from time to time, and, so surely as its chill dust whitened the stones about St. Paul's Church, a wind, like an officious tip-staff, would come and drive it away right and left, sweeping the pavement for bare footsteps that were to follow.

It was all sad and grey and wintry. The over-gabled houses seemed to totter with cold ; the signboards cried with it ; only the church itself, half-shrouded in mist, loomed like some mighty mountain-crag, soaring into one solitary pinnacle, spectral, stupendous, in its midst. The Sabbath folk in the streets below, released from Mass, wrung their frosty fingers as they lingered in dull excitement, waiting for the show that was to follow. They gathered in a swarm about the great west door; but mostly they flocked towards the north side, where in an open place

stood the cross of St. Paul's, surmounting the leaden roof of a little timber pavilion. This bothy, or pulpit, was like a dovecot in shape, hexagonal, and with a window in each of its six sides. That facing west was furnished with a lectern for the preacher ; and the whole building was reared on a triple platform of stone, hexagonal like the other, and forming steps to it.

Whether from the weather, or the day, or the occasion, the crowd was a curiously quiet one. The weight of the new King's authority, no doubt, rested upon it heavily. A general air of numbness and stupefaction appeared to prevail. Events of late had come, matured, and yielded to others so rapidly. Edward's death in April ; the disappearance of the young princes, his sons, in June ; the new coronation in July ; Buckingham's short abortive conspiracy and execution in October ; finally, in this very first month of the new year, the passing of the *Titulus Regius*, or Act which bastardised the late King's issue and confirmed the crown to his usurper—such was the astonishing tale. Nothing was evident for the moment but that this crooked fellow could see clearly and strike quickly ;

that he was bold, unscrupulous, and strong. He was not unpopular for that, or for certain manly attributes which the crowd admire. The difficulty was, as in all sudden *coups d'état*, to adapt oneself politicly to the fresh conditions, while awaiting security from retaliation by the old. The twisted King was not so firm in his seat as a Pope of Rome. There was a certain risk in subscribing even to his pleasantries, among which the present show might be counted.

No one had properly believed in the worser guilt of poor Mistress Shore, the late Prince's naughty, good-hearted mistress. The indictment which charged her with complicity in the asserted attempt of Lord Hastings, her second protector, to destroy the present King's life by witchcraft, had succeeded in proving nothing but her lovable qualities of mind and heart ; whereby the Court was obliged to fall back upon her frailty, which was notorious and undeniable. It made no point, indeed, of the real tragedy of her sinning, which lay in her desertion of a young husband—a good, honest, uncorrupt fellow, a prosperous goldsmith of Lombard Street—whose happiness she had done her best to wreck, and whose name she had not had the grace to exchange for another.

It was really only concerned, at bottom, with proving what an obnoxious libertine had been the fourth Edward, and how sweetly the crooked one shone by contrast. And so, to make all this clear, it washed, Pilate-like, its hands of the beautiful frailty, and handed her over to the Churchmen for chastisement. They were prompt to deliver it, and not altogether inhumanly. The concubine was sentenced to make public confession of her fault, in the prescriptive deshabille of sheet and candle, and thereafter depart in peace and mend her ways. The penalty, in fact, was in process at the moment.

There was not much gossip. The crowd, penned within the multitude of low buildings which surrounded the old Cathedral, showed more curiosity, even sympathy, than hostility towards the delinquent. Its constituents were much the same as when it had listened six months before to Dr. Shaw's famous sermon at the Cross, and that truckling divine had first broached the question of the last two Edwards' illegitimacy. It had acquiesced then, in the insensibility following exhaustion ; it had not yet recovered from that condition. This present matter, or the sin which had procured it, was

not of a nature wont to excite much comment or reproof ; but the undoubted popularity of the usurper was confusing all issues. It supposed he had a reason for humiliating pretty Mrs. Shore, who had been as notable for her kindness as her beauty ; and so it accepted his ruling as part of the perplexity of things, which some day must be going to lighten.

She came out in a minute, a half-dozen of acolytes preceding, a group of priests following her. As she appeared on the steps, a waft of wind took the hem of the white sheet, which was her sole drapery, and blew it aside from her knees. Her face, which had been deadly pale, flushed to an instant pink, which never thereafter deserted it. She clapped down her hand in a haste which extinguished the taper she held ; whereat a cold voice halted the procession, and she must stand in her shame while the light was being rekindled. And as they came on again she hung her head and her lip trembled.

“ Her stature,” says an eye-witness, “ was meane [signifying short] ; her haire of a dark yellow ; her face round and full ; her eye grey, delicate harmony between each part’s propor-

tion, and each proportion's colour ; her body white and smooth . . . she went in countenance and pase demure, so womanlie, that albeit she were out of all arαι save her kirtle onlie, yet went she so faire and lovelie, namelie, while the woondering of the people cast a comelier rud in her cheeks (of which she before had most misse), that hir great shame was hir much praise among those that were more amorous of hir bodie than curious of hir soule. And manie good folks that hated hir living (and glad were to see sin corrected), yet pitied they more hir penance than rejoised therein, when they considered that the King procured it more of a corrupt intent, than anie virtuous affection."

" Proper she was and fair ; nothing in her body that you would have changed, but if you would, have wished her somewhat higher"—no romancer can better that description, and so it shall stand.

She came down the steps so shamed that she seemed insensible to the weather. It was snowing again, and the flakes kissed her pink feet as if in pity, and kissed her neck, and cried into her cold bosom. She tried to shake her long, loose hair before her face.

Round by the north side they turned ; and so to the pulpit, where she knelt ; and all the way the people were silent. And the Bishop mounted into the tribune, and, sheltered in his snuggery, delivered a long harangue on the iniquity of loose living. And at the end he demanded of her if she confessed and repented ; whereat she answered, in a voice all little and shrunken : “ I do own my fault, and ask pardon for it.” At which he raised his tone and bade her depart where she would, and mend her ways and live cleanly ; only first he pronounced the King’s mandate, that no man should relieve or succour her on pain of death, which set many marvelling over the reason which could deliver with one hand and deprive with the other.

Now, Jane Shore rose like one dazed, and the lighted taper fell from her hand, and she looked hither and thither, as if seeking where she could escape in her misery and confusion. And all of a sudden the cold seemed to smite her, and she gathered the sheet about her tender limbs and gave a single cry like a lamb. And in its very utterance she had a desperate inspiration, which was to follow a tall man who all this time had stood close by among the crowd.

Something—the shadow of a gesture, the look in his eyes, close under which his hand had gathered his cloak—had seemed to invite her, and when he moved, without appearing to pursue him she followed—on the road to clean living. But was she the first or the only woman helplessly abandoned to the paradoxes of life?

The crowd made way for her, and no man durst follow. Soon she was upon the outskirts of the throng, soon quit of it altogether. Some whispered ribaldries, some rude touches she had to endure, and that was all. She believed that the lure would not have let her lose sight of him ; and sure enough there he was going on in front, a noble by token of his jewelled bonnet, with the long pendant gathered from it about his neck, and the rich scarlet hose which showed under his cloak. She thought well, desperate as she was, not to compromise him, and she followed at a distance. He went round by the deserted east end of the church, through the place that was called Old Change, and so, turning sharp down towards the river, made a sudden twist among the confusion of buildings there, and wheeled into a narrow way known as Sermon Lane, where he loitered just suffi-

ciently to enable her to see him disappear into a certain house. Clutching her sheet about her, and watchful of suspicious eyes, she stole on, hesitated a moment, and hurried in his footsteps. She may have been observed or not; in any case she was a contagion whom all avoided. The door closed behind her as she entered and sank against the wall.

"Rise, madam," he whispered. He was close beside her. His voice was quick and strange.

She burst into tears at once, passionate, heart-rending, exhausting. He let her weep herself out, while she crouched against the wall. Presently, the storm subsiding, she looked half up.

"Will you not give me your cloak?" she said. "I am cold."

"For no other reason?" he asked.

She slunk down again.

"No," she said. "That were a poor pretence, and meet for your mockery. I must barter a private place with you against raiment. Even a whore must go covered."

He stooped and took her, unresisting, in his arms, though she held her face averted. He carried her impassive up the stairs of that dark,

unknown house, and all the way there was passion in his hold and grief in his labouring sighs. She knew that they had entered a warm room, that he had shut the door, had placed her gently on a couch by the fire.

“Jane!” he said.

She uttered a quick, wild cry, and started erect, so that the sheet fell from her shoulders.

“Cover them, in mercy to me,” he said.

She stared at him a moment, then went into a sudden hysterical laugh. It stabbed him to the heart to hear her, for her voice had ever been merry and sweet.

“O!” she cried, “that a woman should be so used by her own husband!”

“Nay,” said he—“but that I might know you still not dead to shame.”

The ripple of her laugh stopped as it had begun.

“Why are you so richly dight, Harry?” she said.

“A lure,” he answered, “to lead thee hither. Who would win a King’s mistress must borrow peacock’s plumes.”

She shivered a little, looking down, then whispered hoarse:

" Well, I am well answered. Yet you look like a noble. O, Harry, speak like one ! "

" God forbid it, Jane ! I will speak like Harry Shore."

" He loved me once."

" Aye ; he is risking death to prove it."

She looked up quickly ; but before she could speak the door opened, and a little boy peeped into the room. He was caught away in a moment by an unseen hand, and the door closed ; but in that instant the woman had snatched her drapery about her nakedness, shamed as she had never been yet.

" A wretch ! " she said, her face on fire.

" Saw'st thou his blue eyes and pretty curls ? " said the goldsmith. " He is son to my master-setter, whose house this is. I had dreamed once of such a babe, mine own and thine."

She rose and crept to him, looking in his face. It was a bronzed and honest one, though drawn with pain.

" Harry," she whispered, " find me clothes and bid me begone—in memory of our once kisses, Harry."

" They are here," he said. " Everything is prepared for thee—the means to lead a blame-

less life henceforth. Summon the woman when I'm gone. I would not have them say I left my wife to starve."

He put out his arms, passion in his eyes, but withdrew them resolutely.

" Nay," he said ; " in heaven—not yet."

He fell back a little, and cried out suddenly :
" Your foot, Jane ! Poor foot ; it bleeds ! "

He motioned her to the couch, knelt, lifted the wounded limb, and with his napkin staunched the trickling blood. He held it to his breast, and at last, with a long, yearning sigh, put his lips to it.

" This hath atoned," he said—" so far I shame myself," and he rose. " Little sinful wife," he whispered, " he loved thee once ; he loves thee ever ; else could he leave thee thus ? Now, let me never hear thy name again—for love's sake do I ask it."

She had buried her face in the cushions. And there she lay, long after he had gone, weeping out her soul.

THE CHAPLAIN OF THE TOWER

“ MY son ! ”

The kneeling figure started slightly, hearing the whisper in its ear, and half turned its face.

“ *Domine salvum fac Regem nostrum Ricardum*, my son.”

The Benedictine had stolen list-footed from among the shadows of the great pillars, and stood, a blacker shadow, bending over the solitary worshipper in the darkening chapel of St. John. It was a breathless August evening of the year 1483, and not a sound penetrated to this remote fastness of the Keep.

“ God save the King, Father ! ” answered the suppliant. It was Brackenbury himself, Lieutenant of the Tower, and a sore matter of conscience had brought him to this place. He rose instantly to his feet.

“ I say it with all my heart,” quoth he. “ God

save the King—from numbering himself among his worst enemies."

"Sh—sh!" whispered the chaplain. "Sh—sh! good Sir John." He put a finger to his lips, and, motioning the other forth, held him on the outer threshold.

"To ensure the pure succession," he said low. "This bastard boy, Sir John—a canker that would eat into the State. No safety but in his excision."

"For the second time," replied the knight sternly, "take my answer. Question, if you will, the blood that courses in his veins; question not mine. That stoops to no midnight butchery."

He waved his hand, as if in appeal or protest, towards the chapel, and turned to go. But the priest detained him.

"A moment, good Sir John. The King wills it."

"He must find a baser instrument."

"Well so," said the Benedictine, "well so, good Sir John. Only keep your back to us, saving your honour, and see nothing for a little space."

The Lieutenant, without another word, strode away, his harness clanging in the vaults.

The covert priest stood listening, a smile, small and hungry, on his lips. He hungered, indeed, had always hungered, for many things—preferment, power, the good immoral gifts of life and indulgences other than Papal. And suddenly, amazingly, it appeared, they were all come within his grasp. He had only to persuade this master of his to a certain deed, by absolving him for it before committed, and a mitre awaited him. It had been whispered in his ear, as he had whispered in Sir John's. The abbot of his own Order at Westminster was deeply involved with the Queen-Dowager, to whom he had given sanctuary. The crooked King disliked people who sheltered his enemies. A motion of his hand and the chaplain was in the abbot's place. The seat awaited him—it was stupendous, actual—and, while reaching for it, to be balked by a scruple of conscience not his own ! The thing was intolerable.

Abbot of St. Peter's ! His lips watered, thinking of it ; his eyelids blinked and reddened. He was a lean, famished-looking body, with sharp-set features, and a smile perpetually on his mouth between propitiatory and craving. One might have counted his ribs, and never guessed

at the dreams of surfeit that wantoned under them. He turned and crept away.

That night a messenger rode from the Tower, following in the wake of the royal progress northwards. He found the King where he lay at Warwick Castle, and, entering to him at midnight, whispered of Sir John's obstinate density and of the chaplain's better understanding. A few minutes later Sir James Tyrrell, Master of the King's Horse, started on his way back to London. He took with him a brace of confidants, fat trusty fellows, whose names should be pilloried throughout the ages. They were John Dighton and Miles Forrest, sinewy miscreants, as callous to suffering as Smithfield butchers. He took also a royal warrant, entrusting to him, for one night only, the custody of the fortress, its keys and passwords ; and finally he took, for his personal comfort in the business, a sure conviction of his own damnation. Reaching the Tower, he displayed his commission, locked away all troublesome witnesses, emptied the outer ward, to which the public had access, of its loiterers, and had the place to himself. Having done which, he hastened with his two ruffians to the gate-house where the princes lay.

It was a close, windless night, with thunder brooding over the river. Every stone that slipped under the assassin's feet jarred his nerves intolerably. He muttered to himself as he walked, wringing his wet forehead. The shadow of a figure that rose upon him from the shadowy porch brought an oath from his lips.

"Who's that? Answer, and be damned!"

"Hist, good Sir James!" whispered the crawling priest. "Curse not thine own absolver."

"A blasphemy," answered Tyrrell; "or God Himself is a villain. Come," he said intolerantly: "show us the way to hell."

The Benedictine crossed himself.

"*Ostende nobis, Domine, misericordium tuam,*" he murmured. "Direct our stumbling feet who seek the light by dubious ways. Give me the key, soldier. It were well that I ascended first to report if the children sleep. The better for them, the better for us."

Bending under a low doorway in the wall of the passage, he disappeared. Tyrrell let out a quaking groan.

"Trip his heels, trip his heels, O, devil my master!" he sighed between his teeth.

The shadow went up the stairs, paused at a certain door, fitted a key into its lock with stealthy caution, listened, and glided into the room beyond. It was small, and fast locked in stone ten feet in thickness. There were windows front and back. Through the former a cresset burning on St. Thomas's Tower across the ward cast a red flicker upon a couple of pallets standing near side by side against the wall. A sound of unconscious breathing came from these. The evil shadow crept on and stooped.

Blood on the young white face ! Fool ! it was the painting of the cresset. This deed might seem a pitiful thing were it not for the hunger that seemed a pitifuller. To be abbot—to be bishop—to be cardinal even ! Who knew ? He glanced down. His own inky cassock was smeared with the scarlet fire. To wade through blood to the Sacred College ! Why not ? The end expiated all means thereto. There were a score of precedents to justify him. The Abbacy once gained, his power for good would be multiplied a hundredfold. He raised his eyes. The red glare seemed to fill them from within. Something in his interposing shadow appeared to make the younger child behind him uneasy.

He stirred and moaned in his sleep. Presently, he murmured, with a whimper :

"Take it away, mother!"

He was always her Saxon darling, with the head of gold. She used to call his eyes like cockles in the corn. The shadow stole apart, and, with a sigh, he breathed warm again.

To be abbot! What surer justification of his right than to dispatch these innocent souls to God? They would thank him in the end for much peril spared them. He hesitated no longer, but, leaving the door ajar, descended as he had come.

The human dogs below were straining in their leashes. At a sign Tyrrell motioned them to their work. The two stole up, while their master remained to hold the door. And then came the awful interval.

The blood on the white face! The priest blinked at the cresset flaming high across the yard. Surely it burned with a lurid glow? It was the wind fanning it. Wind? there was no breath of wind in all the dead night. What, then, if not the pipe of wind in passage or key-hole, was that sudden whine which rose upon the silence? With the sweat breaking out on

his forehead, he seized a mattock, one of several which had been laid ready, and began frenziedly striking at the ground under the wall. Tyrrell, with a gasping oath, came hurrying to join him.

They dug like madmen, against their own terror and the vision to come. And when at last it announced itself with heave, and shuffle, and the grunting of brute lungs, they would not pause for a moment, but, reinforced, wrought and wrought until the grave was made, and closed in, and their sin covered. And then Tyrrell, summoning his vile grooms, delivered up his trust and rode away for York, with his soul rattling like a dried kernel within him.

The chaplain thought of a prayer for the dead, and bending, with an abject face, to kneel by the grave, saw dark stains on his sandalled feet. He glanced at the burning cresset, stooped and, touching them, looked at his fingers. To wade through blood ! With a shudder he thrust his hands out of sight into the wide sleeves of his cassock, and went hurriedly away, drifting across the open ward like the black shadow of a cloud.

But the morning found him restored and unrepentant.

Abbot of St. Peter's ! Day by day, while

that preferment was delayed, the hunger ravened in him and the conscience hardened, until his crime, going unrewarded, filled him with an insane and rageful joy. But one evening there came a secret message to him that the King, superstitious after the fashion of the sceptical and world-serving, had taken exception to the place of burial, and desired that the dead should be privately exhumed and reinterred in a place less unconsecrate.Flushed with renewed hope, then, he hugged his confidence, and went with burning eyes about his task.

God knows how he managed to perform it, and alone, and without exciting suspicion. He was lord of his own sacred domain. But, working with demoniac energy, he got out the spoiled young bodies, and conveyed them one by one to the new grave he had himself opened for them under the chapel stairs. There they might repose within sound of the Mass, at peace and at rest for evermore. His imagination, as with monomaniacs, could flow only in one direction. Each day he trod upon the stones that hid his secret, and never faltered or feared. And each day he waited, hungering, for his summons to Westminster.

It came at last—the prize for which he had wrought, and suffered, and bartered his priestly soul. He was in the chapel at the time, and he heard the voice of the Lieutenant calling to him. He hurried out, and saw Sir John standing, citation in hand, at the foot of the stairs.

“Hail, Father Abbot!” quoth the knight, in that derisory tone he had ever assumed towards him since their last interview.

The chaplain, his thin lips chewing out a smile, lingered on the top of the flight. And then, all in a moment, his eyes were seen to fix themselves in a stare of horror, as if some terrific vision opposed them.

“What’s this?” he whispered. “Who put it here?”

The other answered, startled: “I see naught.”

“Ah-ha!”

He threw up his hands with a screech and fell headlong. His neck, as he pitched, doubled under him with a crack, and the body, bowling down, was flung at Sir John’s feet. There, with its head fallen back upon the very stone which locked away its secret, it relaxed and settled.

He had received the wages and paid the price of blood in one and the same instant.

So died that chaplain of the Tower who alone, out of all the kingdom, could have solved the mystery of the tragic dead. When, on the accession of Henry, it became necessary, for reasons of high policy, to disinter the bodies, the grave under the wall was found to have been violated—only rumour could whisper by whom. One of the actual murderers was dead; the other, together with the late Master of the Horse, being seized and questioned, could throw no light upon the matter. Not until two hundred years had passed was the secret to be unearthed by some masons engaged in repairing the chapel stairs.

And the priest? There was a legend once current of an odd little detail connected with his end. And that was that the body, when picked up, exhibited no marks of injury about the head and neck, only the feet were bloody. It might well have been, seeing whereon they had trodden those many days past.

LADY GODIVĀ

“ WILL you not, Leofric? ”

“ Hence! You weary me.”

“ Dear lord? ”

“ Dear lady. So you plead like a child, the gold circlet in thy hair, the gold hem at thy robe, the gold garters about thy knees. Remission of these dues, quotha! Are gems got with forbearance? Go to! you talk. Wouldst sacrifice one garnet in thy brooch to ease these churls of mine? ”

“ O, yes! and more.”

“ More, more! What more? The garnets of thy lips, perchance, thine eyes’ amethysts, the whole treasury of thy love? ”

“ Nay, for that is my dear lord’s.”

“ What so? You are considerate.”

“ Leofric, they come crying at my stirrup: While you lie soft, O lady, we cannot sleep for cold; while you toy with profusion, our

children moan for bread. We toil to keep, not pay, a tithe of what we earn. We may not eat the swine we rear, the eels we net. The taxes crush us; pray you our good lord to lift the heavy burden. Our lives are his.' "

"Do they say so? They shall answer for it for thus importuning you."

"God forbid! Leofric, hear me! For the love of God, Leofric."

"Away!"

"Of the sweet Virgin——"

"Will you tempt me too much!"

"For thy love of poor Godiva."

The Earl turned with a roar.

"*My* love! What of thine, so to scheme to rob me?"

"O, not rob, but give. I would have them love thee as I love."

"By robbing me. That is a one-sided compact. I see naught but my own loss in it."

"Alas! I would give my all."

"A vain boast. What is thine to give?"

She sighed.

"*My* love, perhaps?" he said, mocking.

She shook her head.

"What is thy dearest possession?" he asked,

still bantering. "Most women count their modesty. Wouldst thou give that?"

She said, weeping, "I would trust in Mary."

He stamped down his foot.

"Trust, then! Strip off thy robe, ride naked through the town—so then I will believe thee."

She looked up at him amazed. The colour flushed and waned in her round cheek, leaving it a lily white.

"*But will you give me leave to do so?*" she whispered.

"Aye," he said, breathing scorn.

"And, being done, remit the tolls and set thy people free?"

"On my knightly oath," he swore, and, in a sudden tickle of humour, chuckled her soft chin, and went off between anger and hard laughter.

She was of the stock of Thorold, this young wife, sheriffs of Lincolnshire and a devout and noble family. It had been like garlanding of a bull with flowers, this wedding of her sweet gentleness with the stormy Saxon earl. Yet from the first she had had influence with him. He bore her humorously, one moment reverencing her, the next loving to bring the shameful scarlet

to her cheek, and then to crush her about with his arms in mighty protection and ownership. She had a soft white beauty like a rose, and it was good thus to hold her full fragrance against his breast.

Now, trembling a little and her eyes cast down, she sought Father Thomas, the chaplain of the house, and told him all. Was she justified in the venture? she asked him, her voice scarcely audible.

The man was young and erotic, under his habit a sickly craver of emotions. He would often in his inmost soul gloat upon a dream, a thought —wild and scarce conceivable; yet the authority of his cloth was potent. It was a swooning experience to him to be near her day by day, to feel the leaning of her soul towards his, to handle the soft places of her conscience. Accepting what was regard for his office as regard for the priest, he would whisper to himself: “Even greater miracles have come to pass.” Wherefore now, moistening his dry lips and thinking of her loveliness, he answered her with the Greek proverb: “A little evil is a great good. You are justified, my daughter.”

She turned and fled from him with a strangled

cry. Perhaps she had hoped against hope to find her venture banned by Mother Church ; perhaps, unrecognised by herself, the pure spirit in her had recoiled from contact with a thing unclean. Yet he was God's servant, and he had spoken.

For days after, awaiting the ordeal, she walked as in a nightmare, a rose of fever in her cheek. She named the hour of her trial, and sent her herald forth to cry it, and to pray all human creatures of their love to spare her shame, since she was consecrating her womanhood to their salvation, and offering herself for their sakes to be exposed on this pillory. And a sound like a wind went throughout the town, and each soul there, from thrall to freedman, kindled like dull fire blown upon, and dropped upon his knees to call the bitter curse of Heaven on him that should prove a traitor to such trust. And Godiva heard and sighed ; yet she could not escape that sense of soilure in her, since to a spotless soul it is defilement enough to be outraged in a dreamer's thought. "O, Mother Mary, ward and hide me !" she prayed perpetually.

Her lord learned the truth amazed. She was resolved, then, after all? She would take him at

his word to browbeat and defy him? Yet he would not interfere, nor move one step to control her. But ever in his frowning eyes was a shadow like death, and on his lips a muttered curse : " Will she do it? Will she do it? A wanton—no wife of mine." And, thinking so, he let her have her way, even to the brief command of all his house and borough.

Now, on that day of sacrifice, by noon all Coventry was like a city of the dead. The last step had echoed from its streets ; the voice of lean barter was hushed ; behind veiled windows a thousand ears were strained in thrill and ecstasy to hear the tinkle of a palfry's feet upon the stones without. Only one sacrilegious hound, doomed to eternal infamy, could be found to slur the honest record—a small, livid-faced man, slinking like a fearful thief, his cowl pulled over his eyes, up the steps of the Byward tower by the castle gate. Father Thomas it was, who had left Godiva in the chapel prostrate before the figure of the Virgin, praying for strength to do her part. It was only right, he told himself, licking his pale lips, that the Church should sanction this live-offering by its presence.

The Castle had fallen as silent as the town.

Its inmates whispered apart, or wept if they were women. Its great gate was flung open, its battlements were deserted, its windows stopped and eyeless ; only in the courtyard a single creamy jennet, fastened to a pillar, champed and fretted for her rider.

The frowning Leofric, his ear bent to a curtain close at hand, fingered his sword-hilt as he waited listening. His fair Saxon face, clean-shaved but for the corn-coloured beard which forked from its chin like a swallow's tail, was flushed a deep red ; the muscles of his bare arms and thighs, white against his purple gold-hemmed tunic, twitched spasmodically ; the leggings of twisted gold upon his calves seemed to undulate like snake-skin.

" She shall die first ! " he kept muttering to himself. " She shall die first ! "

A soft step whispered on the stones ; he heard the mare whinny, her trappings clinked. " Now ! " he muttered, and, drawing his blade, parted the curtain noiselessly and looked forth. In the very act he staggered and flung his hand across his face.

His wife—no question of it ! But so etherealised, so remote from his carnal conception of

her, that his soul shrank abashed before the spirit his ruthless challenge had evoked. Her hair was down, veiling her from crown to pearly thigh. A nimbus, painted by the sunlight in its gossamer, seemed to hang about her head. Through golden mist budded a rose of lips, a thought of blue eyes flowered, like little eyes of heaven seen through a haze of dawn. So glorified in her sacrifice, seen, but unseeing, she went by him and disappeared, silent as a figure in a glass. He stood like one turned suddenly to stone.

Full ten minutes must have passed before, coming again to consciousness, as it were, he bethought himself that she would be returning in a little, her task accomplished.

“*Introibo ad altare Mariæ!*” he sighed, amazed. “I will pray my love’s forgiveness. I am not worthy to kiss her little latchet.”

He clanked his sword into its scabbard, and, going like a blind man, sought the chapel. The lamp before the altar shone like a star ; all the dusk air seemed thick with scent of roses ; and before the shrine of the Virgin lay his wife prostrate on the stones.

He stood a moment as if death-smitten ; the blood about his heart seemed to stagnate and

leave him grey as ashes. Then fury was born in him, and flamed to fire.

"A trick!" he stormed within. "She hath bribed another to take her place."

He strode roughly forward, bent, and seized the body to his arms. She never moved or spoke. Looking in her face, he saw its eyes closed, its cheek stone-white. No breath came from the parted lips.

"Dead!" he whispered. "My God! have I killed her?"

Raising his eyes in anguish, he saw the shrine empty. The painted figure of the Virgin proper to it was gone. At that moment a sound of horse's hoofs striking upon the stones outside came to his ear. She was returning! She—who? An awe as of immortality smote into his veins. The body in his arms stirred, and a deep sigh issued from its lips.

"Mother so dear, Mother without stain, protect and cover me thy child with the mantle of thy chastity. I am ready, Mother."

Her fingers trembled to her belt. Leofric, with a gasp of emotion, caught and held them. "Mother?" he choked, and, looking up, saw the figure in its place once more.



There was a distant cry of jubilance, swelling to a roar, and then near at hand another, on a new and startled note. Something had befallen in the castle—something as unexpected as it was very fearful in its revelation. In a chamber of the Byward tower they had come upon the body of the priest. There was an augur in its crooked clutch, and in the boarded shutter of the window a hole to correspond. The body lay decently, and undefiled of blood, but where the eyes should have been were two burnt and blackened sockets.

A judgment, said the people ; but only Leofric and Godiva ever knew of what tremendous import. Divine is beauty, and those who would view it unveiled must risk Actæon's fate.

THE HERO OF WATERLOO

COLONEL MANTON put up his rod and demanded to be set ashore. It had been his first experience of coarse fishing on the river, and it had not proved to his taste. It was not that the perch had been distant or the chub unapproachable. On the contrary, the place having been ground-baited overnight, the sport had been excellent. It was the worms and one other thing which decided him. He had been present at Talavera, at Ciudad Rodrigo, at Badajos, at Vittoria, at Quatre Bras, at Waterloo ; he had seen as much carnage as most men, but this bloodless impaling of lob-worms on hooks, and then casting them, so transfixed, to lie writhing on the river bottom for an indefinite period at the end of a ledger-line, offended his sense of fitness. It was not, it seemed to him, playing the game. The worms had no chance, and they could not bite back. He hated to sit there and think of

what was going on under the quiet water, and the reflection gained nothing in relish from the fact that, by refusing to soil his own hands with the viscous contortions of the creatures, he must appear, in delegating that operation to the boatman, to torture by deputy, like the most cowardly of Eastern despots. And so when, as presently happened, this same stolid deputy, in "disgorging" an obstinate hook from a barbel's throat tore away—— But it is enough to say that the Colonel put down his rod and demanded there and then to be set ashore.

There was no gainsaying him, of course. It was sufficient that he was the guest of a distinguished General living at Datchet; but in addition to this the Colonel's personal actions invited no criticism. He fished—as he walked, as he rode, as he appeared on all secular occasions—in a dark blue wasp-waisted frock-coat with frogs, in tight nankeen trousers strapped under neat insteps, in a stiff collar and full black stock, in a tall hat with a brim so crescented that its front peak looked like the "nasal" of a Norman helmet. And for the rest he carried himself and his white moustache with the conscious authority of a cock of a hundred fights.

The boatman put him ashore on the river-bank some half-mile below Datchet, towards which village he immediately addressed his steps. The path was lonely and unfrequented, and it gave the Colonel some surprise to observe, as he turned a clump of bushes, a "fashionable old beau toddling along it in front of him. In a few moments the latter paused, nonplussed, at a stile, and the Colonel came up with him.

The pedestrian was a man of uncouth bulk but distinguished mien. He wore a black frock-coat of a somewhat military cut, with a rich fur collar. Curly auburn locks, obviously artificial, showed beneath the brim of his glossy hat, and accented somewhat ghastfully the puffy pallor of a face whose texture betrayed its age. His eyes had a glutinous, half-blind appearance ; his loose lower lip perpetually trembled. He peered at the newcomer, panting a good deal, as if the sudden apparition had shaken his nerves.

" If I may venture, sir," said Colonel Manton, and proffered his arm. The other accepted it to mount the stile. It was an ungraceful business, and, once over, he stood, with his hands to his sides, vibrating heavily, like a worn-out

engine, to his own respirations. Presently he was sufficiently recovered to speak.

"A damned obstruction—a damned obstruction! Cannot I leave my carriage a moment to walk round by the water but this annoyance must appear in my path!"

"A villainous stile," said the Colonel. "We will indict it for a trespass."

He was a reasonable man, and he felt the absurdity of the complaint. But, to his surprise, his sarcasm missed fire.

"Do so, do so," said the old gentleman, and took his arm again, as it might have been his own walking-stick. They went on together, and in a little the stranger had opened a conversation with all the effrontery in the world.

"My boy, what's your rank?" said he. "I perceive you are a soldier."

The officer stared, and drew himself up.

"Colonel Manton, sir, at your service," he answered distantly.

He was surprised; but the man was old, near seventy by his appearance, and very possibly from his cut a retired veteran like himself. Familiarity from a general, say, would be par-

donable, and even kindly. Besides, he did not dislike the implied suggestion of juniority.

"Hey!" said the stranger—"retired?"

"Yes sir, retired."

"Brevet rank?"

"Brevet be damned!" said Colonel Manton hotly. "I owe my promotion, sir, if you wish to know, to Waterloo."

The stranger glanced at him with a curiously sly look, and pinched the arm on which his own fingers rested.

"What!" he said, "were you there?"

"I had the honour, sir," said the Colonel grandiloquently, "of playing my little part in that Homeric contest."

"Whose division, hey?"

"Picton's—Pack's brigade. You are a little—you will excuse my saying it—particular."

"Certainly I will, my boy. Wounded—hey?"

A distinct flush suffused the Colonel's cheek.

"Wounded—yes," he replied shortly.

The old fellow nudged him confidentially.

"Tell me," he said—"how?"

"Look here—you must forgive me, you know," exploded the Colonel; "but I must point

out that we are strangers. Still—as a fellow-campaigner—if that is the case—may I ask, sir, if *you* were at Waterloo? ”

The other laughed enjoyingly.

“ *Was I?* ” he said. “ To be sure I was. You had all good reason for knowing it.”

Colonel Manton’s eyes opened. Here was a momentous implication. Evidently he had to do with some great general of division, though the boast sounded a little extravagant and un-military. He ran over in his mind a dozen possible names, but without success. And then the thought occurred to him : “ Good reason for knowing it? What the devil ! Is it possible he was on the other side? ”

The idea seemed too preposterous for belief ; the stranger was so obviously British. Who, in wonder’s name, could he be, then? Hill, Macdonnell, Saltoun, Uxbridge, Vandeleur, Somersett, Hackett—all divisional or brigadier-generals? He could not identify him, of his knowledge, with any one of these. The Iron Duke himself? He had never been brought into very close personal contact with the great man, but naturally he was familiar with his features. Could it be possible that time had so fused and

blunted those that their characteristic contour had degenerated into this scarce distinguishable pulp? Prosperity, he knew, could play strange tricks with countenances, yet a *volte-face* so revolutionary seemed incredible. And yet who else but the Duke had been on that day as indispensable as implied? But it was conceivable that some might have so regarded themselves—that certain heads might have been turned by their share in the success of so stupendous a victory.

Colonel Manton had been living abroad on his half-pay for some years, and, until the occasion of this visit during the summer of 1830, had dwelt for long a stranger to his native land. He could but suppose that he had in a measure lost the clue, through subsequent developments, to old events. It remained clear only that he was in the presence of one who had, or believed himself to have, contributed signally to the success of the epoch-making battle. And that must be enough for him. He spoke thenceforth as a subordinate to his commanding officer.

"I beg your indulgence, sir," he said. "I have been absent from my country for a considerable time, and features once familiar elude

me. You asked about my wound. It is a ridiculous matter, and I recall it without enthusiasm. The fact is that, when d'Erlon's guns were pounding us before the advance, a ball smashed the head of a sergeant standing near me, and one of the fellow's cursed double-teeth was driven into my neck. It was not enough to cripple my fighting-power, but I would have given a dozen of my own to boast a more honourable scar."

The stranger chuckled.

"Scars are not the only guarantee of valour," he said.

The Colonel ventured : " You brought away some of your own, sir? "

" No," said the old fellow. " No ; Wellington and I got off scot-free."

The Colonel dared again : " Were you, may I ask, on his personal staff? "

" Well, yes," said the stranger, chuckling still more, " I suppose you might call it that."

Suppose? Colonel Manton gaped. It was positively a matter of history that not one of that staff had escaped death or mutilation. The other may have noticed his perplexity, for he turned on him with an air of sudden annoyance.

"You haven't the assurance to question my word, I hope, sir?" he demanded.

"Certainly not," answered the Colonel.

"I could give you convincing proof," said the stranger. "Did the Commander-in-Chief—now did he or did he not—visit General Blücher at Wavre the night before the battle to make sure of his co-operation?"

"It is a disputed point, sir," said the Colonel. "I believe that even his Grace has been known to contradict himself in the matter, saying at one time that he would never have fought without Blücher's explicit promise to back him up, at another flatly contradicting the report that he saw the Prussian general on the night before the battle."

"And he did not, my boy," sniggered the old fellow triumphantly, "for his interview with him was after midnight, and therefore on the day *of* the battle. I ought to know, *for I sent him off there myself.*"

He cackled into such a spasm of laughter that the convulsion caught his wind.

"O, my chest!" he wheezed and gasped, "my miserable chest! I'm the most wretched creature on earth. But it's nothing, nothing—

the youngest fellows are subject to it." He coughed and wiped his eyes with a heavily-scented handkerchief. "Yes," he said presently, "yes, Wellington was a sound workaday general, a fine soldier, an inspired commissary, but, of genius—h'm! We need only suggest, Manty my boy, that he was well advised. The man at his elbow, hey? You need not mention it, you know, but the real hero of Waterloo—hey, d'ye see? Keep it to yourself; there were reasons against its being divulged—you understand? What, my boy!"

The Colonel stared before him as if hypnotised; he stumbled in his walk. Was it possible to mistake the implication—that the laurels ought by rights to have adorned the brow of this stranger beside him? He felt like one whose faith had suddenly exploded of its own intensity, leaving his breast a blackened shell. Could there actually have been another, of whom he had never heard, at the Duke's right hand on that tremendous day, the presiding but unconfessed genius of it? He had heard speak of the Corsican's little red familiar. Was his great rival, were possibly all commanding intellects, so supernaturally provided?

He was really a simple man, with a mind ruled to certain prescriptive lines of conduct. He glanced askance at his companion, who was smiling and murmuring to himself. Who in Heaven's name could he be, and why had he selected *him* for his astounding confidences? For all his own fearless rectitude, an uncanny feeling began to possess him. He was glad, in turning a corner, to see the end of the path, and the head of a waiting coachman showing above the hedge. And the next moment they had emerged on to the village green.

A barouche stood there, with a bareheaded gentleman standing at its door. The liveries of the servants were scarlet, and a mounted man in a scarlet embroidered coat waited a little apart. The gentleman came forward.

"Will your Majesty be pleased to ascend?" he asked.

The King dropped the Colonel's arm, and appeared on the instant to forget all about him.

"Yes, Watty; yes, certainly, my boy," he said. "Is that the fiery chariot?"

MAID MARIAN

“MASTER KAY, are you my friend?”

“Hear me vow it, madam.”

“Alas! what vow?”

“That I am your friend.”

“Can you so perjure yourself? Are you not the King’s friend?”

“O, yes, indeed!”

“How can you be his friend and mine?”

“Why, as the bee’s the flower’s friend. I carry messages of love.”

“Does he ask mine of me?”

“Just that, madam—only your love, no more.”

“No more? You say well. Why, truly my love were a little thing to be valued at no more than a man’s base desire.”

“The man is the King, madam. His desire is great like himself.”

“The King is the man, sir, and the man is hateful to me. Will you tell him so, and be indeed my friend?”

“It would serve you ill, madam.”

"Will he force me? Alack! I will kill myself."

"Nay, that you shall not, save you hold your breath and die of your own sweetness like a rose. No other way, be assured. He will wear you in his bosom first."

"God! Dear Master Kay, good Master Kay, sweet, gentle friend, let me kill myself!"

"I must not."

"But to leap from the wall! It is a little way—but a step, and to save me hell? You would not have me burn for ever?"

"I would have you reasonable, madam.*

She had fallen on her knees to him, this Maud Fitzwalter, fair daughter of Robert the Baron, who was to come to head the revolt against the infamous King. Her long white fingers plucked at his sleeves; her eyes sought his eyes imploringly. He drank of them, lusting in their passionate appeal. She was called Madelon la Belle, and to see her was to think of spring, with its crab-blossoms against a blue sky, its glow and youth and waywardness. There is a lack of the sense of symmetry in Love that makes his sweetest faces out of drawing; and yet one never doubts but that they are Love's

faces, as endearing as they are faulty, and for their very faultiness most lovable. His drawing, I say, may be defective, but he knows the trick of lip and eyelash to a curve and how to snare men's hearts thereby. And so, while we criticise his work, saying that this or that line goes astray, we would not have it turned by a hair's breadth nearer the truth, lest we should miss love in aiming at perfection.

Such a face was Maud's, framed in its yellow braids so long that, parted from her forehead and plaited in with a cord of gold, they almost touched the ground when she stood up. For the rest her simple tunic was green, and clasped loosely at the hips by a belt of jewelled gold, the slack of which hung low. Madelon la Belle she was called, or Passerose, for the sweetness of her Saxon face and the Saxon blue of her eyes. But most of all she herself loved her name of Maid Marian, given her in those green holts and brakes of Sherwood whither she had followed her own true love, the outlawed Earl, and whence, in a dire moment, she had been ravished by the cursed King. He had seen her loveliness and coveted it, and where John coveted was no safety for wife or virgin. And so it

had befallen that once, when abiding in her father's castle of Dunmow, the Baron being absent, he had come, shedding in his hot haste his smooth phrases and courtly wiles, and had torn her from her shelter and carried her to London to his Tower on the Thames. And there he kept her fast, not doubting but that she would yield to him in time, and glooming ever a little and a little more as her obduracy held him aloof.

This Kay was one of the King's minions, whom he would send to bribe or threaten the lovely captive into surrender. The fellow was no better than a maquereau, who tasted passion by deputy. He was confident, in the soft persuasiveness of his voice, in the irresistibility of his figure and finery, of the ultimate success of his mediation. His hair, rolled about his ears, was scented; his tunic, short beyond custom, was of gold-embroidered crimson, and his hose were like-hued. A curt-manteau, of cloth of gold lined with green, hung about his shoulders, and on his feet were boots of green cloth, the upper part of lattice-work, embossed at each crossing with a little leopard's head in gold. He had no real heart of tenderness or mercy. He was a mere painted mask, as bowelless as the Elf-maiden herself.

" I would have you reasonable, madam," he said.

She rose and stood away from him.

" Is it not in reason to guard one's virtue? " she said, panting.

" Nay," he answered ; " but if you guard it alone and weaponless, and the thief come in well-armed and strong of body? It were reason better to yield it with a good grace."

She threw herself upon a bench wailing, " O, hence, thou beast! " And so she lay writhing— " Only to die—and they will not let me die! "

She sought and cried for death perpetually ; she knew she was lost, lacking that kind friend. Was it not pitiful? she whom life had so favoured and love so moulded. She sought him, moaning and wringing her hands, at barred windows, in dusky corners ; she entreated her gaolers to have pity on her, to put poison into her food, to lend her a weapon, or a pathway to the battlements whence she might cast herself down. Her every prayer but increased their watchfulness ; Death was excluded from her as jealously as if he had been her outlawed lover himself.

On this day her desperation had risen to a pitch scarce endurable. There had been signs

that the royal patience was near exhausted. And it was late spring without—she could see it through her window across the green flats that stretched beyond the moat, beyond her prison. Its sweetness reminded her of past days in the forest, so that her heart came near to breaking. Her lips whispered the words of the little glad song that she and her Robin had often sung together :

“Summer is a comin’ in,
Loud sing cuckoo.
Groweth seed and bloweth mead,
And springeth the wood now.
Sing cuckoo, cuckoo.”

“Sing cuckoo,” she wept, “the wanton’s shame! O, Robin, my Robin!” She would never see him again—could never wish to. In a few hours, perhaps, she would be a thing for his scorn, a thing that not death, found too late, could cleanse.

In the evening came the King himself, with his frowning eyes and grim jaw that, with the thick beard clipped close on it, looked like a bulldog’s. He was in a furious mood, his Queen having vexed him, and flashed and scintillated like a scaled devil in the light of the dozen torches he brought.

"How now," he thundered, "thou rever's doxy! Still obdurate?"

Her very heart shook; but she stood up to him bravely.

"Plunge thy knife into my breast, Sir King," she said, "and with my last sigh I will praise thee."

"What!" he snarled—"so much in love with Death? We'll see to it thy desire's whetted in his fondling. He shall prick thee here and there before ye close. Away with her to the Watch Tower!"

It was at least a respite, and she had dreaded the instant worst. This Watch, or Round Turret, rose from the north-east angle of the great Keep. He had her there at his mercy. Her cries might rise to heaven, but could not penetrate the dense fabric below. In this chill, high dungeon they imprisoned the girl. Its cold, its dreadful loneliness, scant food, and the silent guard should break her spirit, the wretch thought. He would taste her submission to the dregs, then fling her to his lackeys to teach her what it meant to flout her King. She answered by starving herself; on which came Kay, the silky-tongued, and warned her smoothly that such con-

tumacy could only invite its swift reprisal. She would not be permitted so to slip through her royal lover's hands. Whereat she ate all that they would give her, and despaired the more.

There was no escape, none. Locked in as she was, she knew that her every movement was canvassed by hidden eyes, her every sigh recorded. And Robin made no sign.

One day it moved her to hear unwonted sounds rising from the outer ward below, into which the public were admitted on occasion of State festivities, executions, and so forth. The multitudinous jollity of voices, soaring above the whine of bugle and tap of drum, proclaimed it a May-day revel, when the whole place was delivered over to sport and merriment.

She could not see from her high, narrow window, sunk deep in the wall; but the babble flowing in on a shaft of sunlight made her heart warm as it had never felt for days. Some spirit of release seemed to ride in on the happy music, some emotion that made her bosom heave and her eyes fill thick with tears.

She was standing, drinking in the merry noise, when her lids blinked involuntarily, and, with a swish and smack on the ceiling of her cell, something alighted at her feet. She fancied on

the instant that a bird had flown in and struck against the stone ; but, looking down quickly, she saw that it was a broken arrow—one of a dear, familiar pattern. With a gasp she stooped, snatched at it, and stood listening. There was no sign of any one having observed. With swift trembling fingers she detached a strand of green worsted which was knotted about the shaft under the quill, and found beneath a folded scrap of parchment, which, on being opened, revealed a glutinous smear of brown substance, and just these four woeful words written above :

“ Poor Robin’s Pledge. Farewell.”

It was her death-warrant.

So sweet and tragic, her heart near stopped from its sorrow as she read it. She knew at once what it was—a mortal Arab poison, given long years ago to her woodland lover by a follower of the Lion King. It might serve him in a sore need, had been the words accompanying the gift—to taste it was death. And once Robin had shown it to her, proposing, half-playfully, that they should pledge one another in its Lethe were Fate ever to dispart them.

And so she knew that her last hope was dead before her. Robin could not come. He was hurt; he was ill; the guards were too many

for them, the Fates too strong, and their only refuge at last was in death. He had sent some one of his cunning archers, Will Scarlet belike, to take advantage of this merrymaking to speed the message, and, when she had realised all that it meant to her, she fell on her knees with a bursting prayer of gratitude to the Providence, to the dear lover, between whom her honour was held safe from the despoiler.

She never doubted that her Robin meant to share the pledge. Likely his dear spirit was waiting for her now, eager to link with hers in the green woods where first their loves were spoken. Fearful of interruption, she put her lips to the poison, and died with his name on them.

That evening came Master Kay to the cell, with a sick smile on his mouth, and in his hands a tray of comfortable things, including a flask of drugged wine. The King's patience was exhausted.

But when he saw what had happened he stole out, and fled to join the refractory Barons, of whom was Fitzwalter, father of Madelon la Belle.

And in the meantime Robin did not die. The poison that was to kill him came years later from the hand of his kinswoman, the Prioress of Kirklees. Women will take things so literally.

THOMAS PAINE

“ AH, monsieur ! ” said the tall, nervous prisoner with the ravaged face, “ the rights of one man are very well the wrongs of another—that is a new discovery ; but you did not make it. Even God—who, nevertheless, does not exist just at present—could not invent a gale that would favour all ships ; and yet you have thought yourself cleverer than God.”

“ I do not know you,” interrupted his hearer and fellow-captive peevishly. “ Why do you presume to address yourself to me ? ”

“ Why ? ” The other lifted a little broken plaque or medallion which hung by a spoiled tricolour ribbon from his neck. “ Do you observe this, M. Paine ? I am one Garat, ex-President of the Sectional Committee of the Bonnet-Rouge, and this is my badge of office—or what remains of it. It represented the table of the law, *en précis*, as revealed to Mr. Paine on Sinai. Wearing it, I symbolised the Rights

of Man. Well, what I say is, ‘ Damn the Rights of Man ! ’ ”

“ O ! certainly, if you wish,” responded Mr. Paine coolly.

“ They are fragile, are they not ? ” said the ex-President, with feverish derision ; “ they are apt to be broken in any scuffle. And where is there not a scuffle where opinions differ—which they always do ? The *Rights of Man* have not, I perceive, altered the *nature* of man, which is to have his way wherever he can get it. Observe : I desired to do justice according to this tablet, but the mob would not permit me. Instead they haled away their suspect, unheard ; and I, because I would not commit him unheard, was pronounced a traitor to the principles I represented and was despatched to this Luxembourg, where, to my profound amazement, I find incarcerated before me the lawgiver himself ! Now I think I begin to understand everything. Your Rights of Man could not even save yourself. What the devil did you want redeeming others with them ? For me, I would welcome all my ancient wrongs to find myself once more a prosperous barber in the Marche Neuf.”



In Paris on the 28th July, 1794, at six o'clock in the evening, ended at a stroke the Terror, lopped off by the head. It had been virile and active up to that last moment, prepared with its daily *fournée*, all chosen and set out for the baking; only in the result the order had been somewhat changed. Messieurs the Triumvirs and their following had been called upon to take the place of their destined victims—that was the difference.

But the evening before the death-carts had jolted as usual on their monotonous way to the Place du Trône; and therein surely the insensate tragedy of the guillotine had found its crowning expression. For at that time the dissolution of the Terror had actually begun, and the smallest gift of fortune or of foresight might have saved the lives of a half-hundred innocents. There is no sorrier fate than to perish in the lash of a just expiring monster's tail.

There was one man appointed to figure in those tragic last tumbrils who had the best reason in the world for considering himself a spoilt child of Fortune. This was Mr. Deputy Thomas Paine, some time fallen from his popular estate, and since January imprisoned in the

Luxembourg. We see him, as he stands in the courtyard of the old palace nominally taking exercise, an aloof, self-complacent little man of fifty-seven, dressed in plain brown, and wearing his own brown hair, which nature has curled. His eyes are large, dreamy, and bagged underneath ; his drooping nose has a suggestion of red in its fall ; he has a moist, temulent mouth, rather weighed down at the corners by pursey cheeks.

It is evening of the 26th July, and the prisoners, their brief liberty ended, are filing back to their cells. There is an unwonted excitement abroad. Some rumour of it has penetrated the walls, and fluttered the breasts of the poor caged birds within. A change is imminent ; they know not what ; but scarce any could be for the worse. Meanwhile, nevertheless, Fouquier's emissary is up above, condemned list in hand, waiting to prick off the names for the morrow's batch. The procedure is quite simple ; it consists in a chalk-mark made on the door of each victim's cell, whence on the following morning its inmate will pass to the Conciergerie, to the Revolutionary Tribunal, back to the Conciergerie, and thence the same evening to the scaffold. That

is a predestined course, which much treading has made monotonous and much philosophy smoothed. It is possible even to walk it with a gay fatalism—under prescriptive circumstances. Supposing, however, that there *be* truth in the reports; that the Triumvirs are threatened and the Terror itself doomed? What tragedy on tragedy, then, to drown in the turn of the tide! The prisoners, yesterday resigned, to-day are pacing their cells like wild beasts. Yet nothing will avail them. The last tumbrils must have their load.

Paine was sensible of their misery; he believed in the imminence of a political *volte-face*, and he pitied them. For himself he had not, nor ever had had, the least apprehension. As he lingered in abstraction, the last to withdraw, his own security, his own importance, were the first of convictions in his mind. As a moderate, he was unacceptable to the extremists—it amounted to no more than that. He had been put out of the way because he was in the way. But they would never dare more than to coerce into silence so notable an apostle of liberty. He reviewed, with some smug satisfaction, the processes of his own career. By origin

a Norfolk staymaker, by chance an exciseman, by nature a demagogue, his inherent force of character had lifted him to a position which suffered at the moment only a temporary eclipse. Was it to be believed that he who had forcibly contributed to the Declaration of American Independence, who had been honoured and rewarded by the Legislature of Pennsylvania, who had earned Franklin's friendship and Burke's hostility, who had been elected by the Department of Calais to sit in the French Convention, and whose bold assertion of the Rights of Man had been accepted for the very ritual of the Revolution, would be let to be snuffed out by the dirty fingers of a murdering attorney? Fouquier dare not do it ; Robespierre, Couthon, St. Just, the all-powerful Triumvirate, were not assured enough for such a venture. Besides, they represented, in an age of reason, the crowning expression of reason—that government by minority which had always been a pet theory of his.

He frowned, then lifted his eyebrows with a smile. Something in the connection, a memory of his own once discomfiture on a certain occasion, had recurred to him. It had happened in

London, in a Fleet Street tavern, two or three years before. How remote it all seemed! Dr. Wolcot—he who called himself Peter Pindar—had been there—a huge, overbearing old voluptuary, with flashing eyes, and a flashing wit, and a scurrilous tongue. Paine had been discoursing to an admiring audience on the reasonableness of deciding questions in Parliament by minorities instead of majorities, “since,” said he, “the proportion of men of sense to ignoramuses is but as one to ten. Wherefore the wisest portion of mankind are always in the minority in debate”—a statement which the Doctor disputed. “Still,” said the latter, “I will assert nothing for myself, but leave the question to the company.”

Now, at that, Paine, confident of his surroundings, had risen, and put the question to the vote, those who agreed with him to hold up their hands. Whereupon every hand had gone up, and the Doctor had arisen, with a bow. “Gentlemen,” he said, “I thank you for this decision in my favour. The wise minority, as represented in my person, carries the vote. I pronounce Mr. Paine wrong.” And he had swallowed his glassful and lumbered out.

Somehow the prisoner remembered that occasion with pleasure. It suggested a form of liberty much more in accord with his real nature than a world of abstract utilitarianisms. The wine in the Luxembourg was thin ; indulgences were few ; they often dined off stale sprats. The end of his own nose, touched by a ray of the slanting sun, caught his eye as with the glint of a ruby. He pished under his breath.

" Bah ! " he muttered. " He was a domineering beast ; but I wish I were with him now at Dick's in Fleet Street."

He sighed and stirred ; and it was at that moment that the stranger of the broken plaque had approached and accosted him. He was a newcomer, and unknown to the ex-Deputy.

" To the devil with your Rights of Man ! " ended the tall prisoner. He caught at Paine, who had turned an angry shoulder to him and was going. " Is it not so ? " he demanded. " They are just one's right, it appears, to run with the crowd the crowd's way. If one takes the *Liberty* to pause a moment for reflection, one is trampled underfoot by *Fraternity* and packed off to discuss *Equality* with the other heads in the basket."

"I would have you observe," said Paine frigidly, "that the turnkey is summoning us to return to our cells."

He moved away, but the other followed close beside him, agitated and voluble.

"Cells!" he cried—"cells! But is not that a fine comment on your propaganda? I interpret your Rights according to the tables, and you send me to the guillotine for it."

"*I?*" said Paine. He stopped in desperation.

"Is not your emissary up there now," cried Garat, "marking off the doomed?"

"*My* emissary?" said Paine.

"You are as responsible as any for him," said the ex-President, kneading his damp palms together. "If you *would* try to blow east and west at once, meddling with unknown forces. You should have remembered, monsieur, that the first right of man is to existence. There would have been a fine air of originality about that precept. It has always been the easiest thing in the world to solve human problems by killing."

The demagogue took refuge behind derision.

"I perceive you are simply a coward," he said.

"Yes," cried Garat, his lips trembling. "I

am simply that. What can you expect, who have decreed us annihilation for our despair? Our ancient wrongs conceded us a heaven after all; your modern rights have taken it away. It is all very well for you, safeguarded by your position, to pretend to despise death; it would be another matter, I expect, if you feared, like me, to find the chalk-mark on your door."

"Rest assured," said Paine contemptuously. "If you have sought to serve Justice, Justice will not destroy her own."

"But there are accidents."

"I answer for her, I say," insisted the demagogue, with an air of pompous finality. "You may trust to my own share, citizen—grossly as you libel it—in her modern scheme, which provides against such possibilities. No trick of Fortune is permitted nowadays to spare the guilty or condemn the innocent."

"But are you sure, monsieur? Monsieur, in God's name!"

Paine waved the creature aside with a peremptory gesture, and continued his way across the yard. They were the last to enter the prison, and they mounted the naked stairs almost together. In the same corridor above were their cells situated, and Torné, the surly gaoler, was

already holding half-closed the door of Garat's, which came first. It was bare of the fatal sign, and Garat ran into his fold with a bleat like a comforted sheep.

Mr. Thomas Paine, with a shrug and sneer, tripped on his way to his own cell. Reaching it, he raised his eyes, staggered slightly, and gave a single gasp. Its door was flung back against the outer wall, *and the mark was on it.*

Inside! He had but to close it upon himself, and the mark would vanish. Fouquier's hurrying emissary, not being of the wise minority, had overlooked that contingency.

Torné, having locked in Garat, was coming down the corridor. Screening the sign with his arm, the ex-Deputy swung round the door and shut himself in.

He died a dozen deaths before he heard the key turn in the lock outside—a hundred before the news of next day's *coup d'état* came to restore life to ten thousand withering hopes.

But the tumbrils went on the morrow, and for the last time, all the same—only he was not a passenger by them. It was just his luck that Fortune was offered such a characteristic way of retaliating upon him for his boasted command of her.

FAIR ROSAMOND

A LADY, accompanied by a small armed retinue, rode out of a forest glade near Woodstock, and, pausing beside the waters of the Glyme, which here came tumbling in a little weir, smooth as a barrel of glass, over an artificial dam, reined in her steed, and sat gazing, in the full glow of noon, upon the scene before her.

It was a scene of perfect pastoral quiet—woodland and meadow as far as the eye could reach, broken by green hillocks and dominated by a solitary keep of stone set on a leafy height in the foreground. To the right a film of floating vapour showed where a hidden hamlet smoked. There was no other token of human life or habitation anywhere.

The lady, halting a little in advance of her party, made a preoccupied motion with her hand, whereupon there pushed forward to her a certain horseman, who dragged with him a churl roped

to his saddle-bow. The knight was in bascinet and chain-mail like the others, but his shield and *pavon* were emblazoned with arms betokening his higher rank.

"Messer de Polwarth," said the lady, "is not this in sooth Love's paradise?"

"Certes, madam," he answered grimly; "it is the King's Manor of Woodstock."

She laughed; then, stiffening suddenly in her saddle, pointed upwards.

"Look!" she said.

A poising kite, as she spoke, had dropped to the wood-edge, and thence rose swiftly with a dove beating in its talons.

"Behold a fruitful omen," she cried, and turned on the hind: "Dog! where lies the garden?"

De Polwarth struck the fellow a steely blow across the scruff.

"Answer, beast!"

The man, a sullen, unkempt savage, pointed with an arm like a snag.

"Down yon, a bowshot from the lodge.
Boun by the waterside."

The lady nodded, her eyes fixed in a sort of smiling trance. She was Eleanor of Aquitaine,

no less, the divorced wife of France, the neglected and embittered Queen of England, and she was at this moment on the verge of flight to those rebellious sons of hers who conspired in Guienne against their father.

But, before she fled, she had just one deed of savage vengeance to perpetrate, and of that she would not be baulked, though to accomplish it she must ride across half England. Somewhere, she knew, in this place was situated that "house of wonderful working—wrought like unto a knot in a garden," where lived her hated child-rival, that beautiful frail rose of the Cliffords who had borne the King a son. So much the worse for her—so much the worse.

The Queen descended to earth, spiritually and literally. She was dressed like a queen in a belted blue robe latticed with gold, and a long purple cloak over. A jewelled coronet embraced her headcloth and the headcloth her face. The rim of hair that showed under was still, for all her fifty odd years, crow black. Her colour was high, her frame masculine; the prominence of her lower lip gave her a cruel expression, and without belying her.

"Nay, de Polwarth," she said, as the knight made a movement to dismount. "No hand in this but mine."

He retorted gruffly: "The place is reputed impenetrable."

She smiled. "Hate will find out a way. Rest you here till I return."

Never to be gainsaid, she went off alone by the streamside, and soon disappeared among the trees beyond.

Her way took her under the slope of the hill which ran up to the King's Manor. At first, looking through the branches, she could catch glimpses of the strong, irregular pile, butting like a mountain crag from the forehead of the green height; but, in a little, the density of the trees increasing, the house was hidden from her view, and she had only the thick, towering woods and the little stream for company.

On and on she went, resolute to her purpose, thrilled with some presentiment of its near accomplishment—and suddenly a white rabbit ran out from the green almost under her feet.

She stopped dead on the instant, and, as she stood motionless, the thicket parted near the bole of a great beech-tree hard by, and a little boy

slipped out into the open. He was pink-cheeked, Saxon-haired and eyed—a shapely manikin of five or so. Intent on recapturing his pet, he did not at first notice the stranger; but when he turned, with the bunny hugged in his arms, he stood rosily transfixed. In a swift stride or two the Queen was upon him, cutting off his retreat.

She stooped, with a little exultant laugh.

"What is thy name, sweet imp?" she said.

He pouted, half-frightened, but still essaying the man, rubbing one foot against the opposite calf.

"Willie Clifford, madam," he said, wondering for a moment at her crown; but then panic overtook him.

"Nay, Willie," said the Queen, holding him with a hand that belied its own softness; "I like thy tunic of white lawn and thy pretty shoon so latched with gold. Hast a fond mother, Willie—whose name I will guess of thee for Rosamond? And for thy father, Willie—do you see him often?"

"He hath a crown like thine, but finer," said the child; "and when he comes he puts it on my head." Something in the staring face above

him awoke his sudden fear. He began to struggle.

"Let me go!" he cried—"I want to go back to my minny."

"Thy minny?" said the Queen. "One moment, child. Is that thy secret way behind the tree there?"

"I will not tell thee," cried the boy. "I want my minny! Let me go!"

With one swift movement she tore the rabbit from his arms, and holding it aloft with her left hand, with her right whipped a jewelled bodkin from its sheath at her waist, and stabbed the little white body, stabbed it, stabbed it. Then she flung the convulsed encrimsoned thing to the ground, and, resheathing the weapon, held the child with a stare of fury.

The swiftness, the savagery, the dreadful novelty of the act had had their purposed effect on him. His eyes widened, his throat swelled; but the scream to which he was on the instant impelled never came. His little soul was paralysed; he was utter slave to horror. If she had told him at that moment to lie down and go to sleep, he would have tried to obey her will, though the unuttered sobs were half-bursting his bosom.

"Now," she said, "now!" panting a little. "Seest, thou harlot's whelp? Cross me again, and so shalt thou be served. Wait here—move one step hence an thou darest—until I come again."

She cast one final look of menace at him, then, stepping to the beech-tree, parted the green and disappeared.

It was a cunning blind, as she had expected. The great trunk was so packed amongst the thickets of the hillside that none would have guessed its concealment of a scarce-discriminable track which threaded the matted growths above and behind it. Mounting by this, the malign creature came suddenly upon a broken opening in the rock, so mossy and so choked with foliage that its presence would have been quite unsuspected from the glade below. She stopped; she uttered a little gloating exclamation; for there, looped over a projection of the stone, was the end of a strong green thread hanging out of the darkness. The clue, of which she had heard whisper with but small faith, was actually in her hand. Providence had doomed the foolish mother to permit her child to sport with the very means designed against her own destruction.

The cavity led into a ramification of passages, roughly trenched and hewn out of the calcareous slate of the hill. Occasionally roofed, mostly open, always tangled in foliage, and so cunningly devised to mislead that it had been near humanly impossible to resolve its intricacies without such guide to follow, the labyrinth led the Queen by a complicated course to a sense of approaching light and release. And then all in a moment the thread had come to an end against a stake to which it was fastened ; and there was a pleasant garden sunk in a hollow of the hill, and a fair young woman, with an awaiting, somewhat troubled expression on her face, standing hard by. She had evidently spun the clue, and returned the first by it from the glade, to make sport for her little man.

The intruder took all in at a glance—the expectant figure, the quiet, inaccessible pleasaunce, the roof of a gilt pavilion rising, a long stone's-throw away, above the branches of a flowering orchard ; dominating all, and hiding this lovely secret in its lap, the wooded hill crowned by its protecting keep.

The young woman, with one startled glance, turned to fly ; but in the very act, staggered

by a recollection, turned, and came towards the Queen, a hand pressed to her bosom. She was a frail thing, in the ethereal as well as the worldly sense—fragile, it seemed, as china, and as delicately tinted. All pink and cream, with pale golden hair, her darker eyebrows were the only definite note of colour in a thin face. Even her long robe of pale green suggested the anæmia of tulip-leaves forced into premature growth.

"A weak craft to have borne so huge a sin," said Eleanor, as the girl approached. She eyed her with malignant scorn, her under lip projecting. "So, wanton," she said, "dost know the wife thou hast wronged?"

The other gave a little mortal start and cry: "The Queen!" and could utter no more.

A small, hateful laugh answered her.

"The wife, fool! the she-wolf against whom you thought to guard your fold with straws. Why, look at you—I could peel you in my hands—a bloodless stalk, without heat or beauty!"

"Spare me!"

"Aye, as the wolf spares the lamb, the hawk the wren. Let me look on you. So this is a King's fancy. I could have wrought him better

from a kitchen-scrub. Quick ! I am in ; I have no time to lose, and thine has come. Poison or steel—make thy choice.”

“ O, madam, in pity ! My heart—I have been weak and ill—I shall not vex thee long ! ”

“ God’s blood ! And baulk my vengeance ? Come—poison——”

“ O ! What poison ? ”

“ Why, that thou art betrayed—supplanted. Another leman lies in thy bed—wife to one Blewit, a willing cuckold. Drink it, thy desertion, to the dregs.”

“ Sin must not beshrew sin. It is bitter to the death ; but I drink it.”

“ O, thou toad ! Thou wilt not die, for all thy stricken heart ? Will this kill thee then ? ”

She whipped out the red stiletto. Rosamond uttered a faint shriek.

“ Blood ! ”

The Queen brandished it before her eyes.

“ I met thy whelp in the glade. It was he who betrayed the way to me.”

The girl gasped and tottered forward.

“ I let him to his death. Monster, thou hast killed my Willie—my boy, my one darling ! ”

She made an effort to leap forward—swayed—and fell her full length upon the grass.

The Queen, softly replacing her blade, stood staring down. No sound or movement followed on the fall. Stooping, she gazed long and silently into the thin face, then, without a word, turned and retreated as she had come.

The boy was standing, white and tearless, by his dead rabbit as she parted the leaves and slunk forth.

"Go to thy mother, child," she whispered, hoarse and small. "She is ill."

THE GALILEAN

A SOLITARY goatherd sat crouched on a slope above the Sea of Galilee. It was approaching morning, and he had lit a little fire on the rocks in order to roast his breakfast of fish. It was still dark, though the embroidered velvet canopy overhead was beginning to reveal a grape-like bloom along its eastern verge. Seven miles across, on the opposite shore, the lamps of Tiberias, minute and liquid, dripped threads of gold into the motionless lake ; to the north the snows of Mount Hermon lay like a pillow to the quiet hills ; everywhere was the swoon and stillness which characterise that last deep hour of slumber when sleep itself sleeps.

The smoke of the goatherd's fire rose in a thin, unbroken shaft ; the hiss and explosion of its thorns were uttered in a subdued voice ; he himself sat like a figure carved in old ivory. His arms and legs were bare ; his only garment

was a tunic of brown sackcloth ; he was the gauntest man of his race in all Galilee. He suggested some grotesque vulturine fledgling rather than a human being, in his leathery skin, denuded scalp, prominent eyes, and great horny beak of a nose. Whatever juice there was in him must have been as brown and acrid as a walnut's.

He had laid his sticks upon a little ledge or plateau where the green of the banks, rising some fifty feet or so from the margin of the lake, first strayed to lose itself among the waste and tumble of the sandstone heights above. Scattered among the bents and yellow boulders from which he had descended lay his silent flock. He was the only soul awake, it seemed, in all that heaped-up solitude.

Suddenly he raised his head. The sound of a footstep, distant at first, but regularly approaching, penetrated to his ears. It fell low and loud, unmistakably human, until it resolved itself into the tramp of a worried man coming over the hills from the south. The goatherd was not interested or concerned. He sat apathetic, even when the traveller, appearing round a bend of the rocks, walked grunting into the firelight and revealed himself a Roman soldier.

The newcomer had a heavy, colourless face with thick black eyebrows. The close chin-piece of his small cap-like helmet gave his lower jaw a bulldog look. His body to the hips was cased in a laminated cuirass of brass, epaulets of which covered his shoulders, and his short tunic was garnished with hanging straps of leather plated with strips of the same metal. Skin-tight drawers descended to the middle of his calves, and were succeeded by puttees of pliant felt, which ended in military caligæ with spiked soles. A short, double-edged sword hung in a sheath at his right side, and in his hand he carried a javelin of about his own height, the shaft of which had served him for a staff. Weary and benighted as he appeared to be, his speech and bearing expressed the arrogance of the dominant race.

"Ho!" he said, "ho!" and stretched himself relieved. "Food and fire, and a respite at least from his cursed chase. What lights are yon across the lake, goatherd?"

"Tiberias."

It might have been an automaton speaking. The soldier swore by all his gods.

"Eighty miles from Jerusalem—a land of rogues and fools! Now directed this way, now

that, mountains where I was told valleys, and torrents for fords, and to find at last that I have taken the wrong bank ! Harkee, thou wooden Satyrus : my horse fell foundered among the hills, and I saw thy fire and made for it on foot. Well, I carry despatches for thy Tetrach, and thou tellest me that is Tiberias yonder. Should I not do well to beat thee for it ? "

The large eyes of the goatherd conned the speaker immovably.

" Tiberias," he repeated. And then he added : " With dawn will come the fishermen."

The soldier cursed : " What, calf ! " and checked himself. " Thou meanest," he said, " a boat to carry me across ? " He heaved out a sigh. " Well, goatherd, so be it ; and while I wait I starve. Dost thou not hunger too ? "

" Aye," said the goatherd, " always and for ever."

The fish were spluttering on the embers. The soldier speared one with his javelin, and, blowing on it, began to eat unceremoniously.

" I would not concede so much to *my* Fates," he said. " I would rob sooner. Besides, here is proof plenty that you lie, old goatherd."

The goatherd bent forward, and prodded

the speaker once with a finger like a crooked stick.

"How old wouldest call me?" he said.

"A hundred."

"I am seven and twenty, Roman."

The soldier laughed and stared.

"Bearest thy years ill. Since when beganst to age?"

"Since I began to starve."

"And when was that?"

"When one said to me: 'Feed on the illusions of the flesh until I come again.'"

"One—one? What one?"

"A strange white man. They called him Jesus of Nazareth about here."

The soldier, his cheek bulged with fish, stopped masticating a moment to stare, then burst into a hoarse laugh.

"Ho ho! my friend! Art in a sorry case indeed! Thou shalt starve and starve, by Cæsar. Tell me the story, goatherd."

The gaunt creature mused a little.

"Why, there is none, Roman, but just this. I had heard of him and scoffed—I, a practical man—and one day (it was many seasons back) he came across the water to these hills, and

a great multitude followed and gathered to him from all sides. And they brought with them a number that were maimed and sick, and the man touched them and they appeared healed, rising and blessing his name, so that I, though counting it an illusion of the spirit, could not but marvel in his magic and the people's blindness. Now the crowd abode here into the third day, and they felt neither thirst nor hunger ; but I, that durst not leave my flock, waiting for them to go, was like a ravenous wolf. And on the third day this Jesus called for food to give to his followers, and some that were his went down to the boat, and I with them. And, lo ! there were but a few loaves and fishes—nothing at all for such a multitude. But I helped to carry these up, and on the way the largest fish of all I hid beneath my tunic, for I thought : ‘ Great he may be, but nothing is lost that I take precautions against his failure to assuage my hunger.’ Then did he bid us all to sit upon the ground, and he blessed and brake the fish and bread ; and so it happened—account it to what you will—for every soul there was a meal and to spare. But when it came to my turn he would give me none ;

only, gazing on me, he bade me, since faith I had not, to feed on the illusions of the flesh until he came again. And I laughed to myself, thinking of the fish ; but, Roman, that fish when I came to devour it was like a shadow in the water, having form but no substance, and so it is with all food to me since. Though I behold it, handle it, I put a shadow to my lips. Yet every day do I prepare my meal, hoping the curse removed, and knowing always it shall not be until he come again."

The soldier broke into a roar of laughter.

"Until he come again!" he cried, "until he come again! O, a jockeyed Jew, a poor deluded Jew!"

He was so gloriously tickled that he had to gasp and choke himself into sobriety.

"Harkee, goatherd," he said presently ; "there was a day, not long past, in Jerusalem—a lamentable day for thee. It thundered—gods, how it thundered, rattling the Place of Skulls! I ought to remember, seeing I was on duty there. Nazareth was it, now? Why, to be sure—I know my letters, and it was writ plain enough and high enough. Jesus of Nazareth, who saved others, but could not save

himself—that was it—one of three rogues condemned. Well, he laid an embargo on thee, did he? You see this spear——”

He paused, in the very act of lifting his javelin, and sat staring stupidly at it. Its point was tipped with crimson.

“The rising sun!” muttered the goatherd, and, getting suddenly to his feet, stood gazing seawards. The soldier came and stood beside him.

The whole wide valley, while they spoke, had opened to the morning like a rose, the clustered hills its petals, its calyx the deep lake, the lights upon it dewdrops shining at its heart. And there upon the dim waters, swinging close inshore, was a fisherman’s boat, its crew gathering in an empty net.

Now the two on the hill stood too remote to distinguish sounds or faces, while the conformation of the rocks hid the shore from their view. But of a sudden, as they looked, the forms in the boat started erect, and, all standing in a huddled group, appeared to gaze landwards. And instantly, as if they had received therefrom some direction, they seized and cast their net the other side of the boat and drew on it, and

the watchers saw by their straining muscles that the net was full. Perceiving which, one of the fishermen, a burly fellow, quitted his hold of the cords, and, leaping into the water, floundered for the shore and disappeared.

"What now?" said the soldier. "Do they spy and seek us?" He muttered vacantly, and glanced again at his spear-head, and shook the haft impatiently. But the sunrise would not be detached from it.

Now the goatherd ran to a cleft which commanded the shore below, and, glaring a moment, returned swiftly, his face alight.

"Rabboni," he said excitedly, "it is the man of Nazareth himself come back, and he ascendeth the hill towards us, and the spell will be removed from me so that I shall taste fish once more."

But the words were hardly out of his mouth when the soldier seized his arm, and, dragging him to the shelter of a great boulder at a distance, forced him to crouch with him behind it, so that they might see without being seen. And so hidden, they were aware of a shape that came into the firelight, and it was white like a spirit of the hills and waters, and it stretched its hands above the embers, so that they leaped again.

And the goatherd heard the soldier mutter in his ear :

"A practical man—you say you are a practical man! Now, who is it?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," he answered.

But the soldier looked at his javelin and it ran with sunrise.

"That cannot be," he said, "for seven days ago I opened his side with this spear as he hung upon the cross, and there is the blood to testify to it."

"I know nothing about that," said the goatherd; "my palate is sufficient evidence for me. Look where they come and lay their fish upon my embers. The very savour of their cooking tells me I can taste again. It is Jesus, sure enough!"

THE BORGIA DEATH

"THIS is the house, father," muttered the Benedictine.

His companion, like himself, wore the black habit of the Order, and his cowl so shrouded his face that little of that was visible but a short white beard fringing a mouth and jaw of singular grimness.

The two stood before the door of a common dwelling situated in a block of buildings near the Ponte Sisto, and almost under the shadow of the Castle of the Capoferri. It was a June evening of the year 1504, and already the seven hills of Rome were like seven burning kilns. The heat radiated from them, even at midnight, would have sufficed a reasonable land for its summer.

The door was opened to the low knock of the friar by a scared-looking young girl. She wore a simple dress of green frieze, the bodice of

which, unlaced to the heat, had slipped about her shoulders. The light of the lamp she carried rounded upon her full lower lip, and gave a dusky mystery to her wide animal eyes. The older man, regarding the child a moment, raised his hand and fondled her chin and neck, deliberately, and like a privileged connoisseur.

"Balatrone's daughter?" he asked.

The girl answered "Yes" with a motion of her lips. Taking him for the prior of some great community, she never even thought of resenting his caress.

"It may count to thy father for a score of indulgences," said the monk. "We shall see. Now take us to him."

She went before, and they followed her into a little stifling chamber looking on a small court-yard where a scrap of fountain tinkled. Tiny as its voice was, it conveyed a thought of refreshment to the sick man who lay on a couch against the wall beside.

The face of this man already bore the shadow of coming dissolution. He had been fat once, and so recently that his skin had had no time to adapt itself to the waste within, but hung in folds like wrinkled tripe. His eyes had a

haunted, pathetic look in them, for he had lived his later time with a damning secret for company, and he dreaded unspeakably the mortal moment which should find him still unrelieved of its burden. Wherefore he had provisionally, and with a reservation in favour of his own possible recovery, confided to his confessor enough of the business to awaken that cleric's lively interest, and to send him off in search of one more fitted, by virtue of his canonical rank and authority, to accept contrition and deliver judgment on a momentous matter. The two lost no time in preliminaries.

"This is one, Balatrone," said the friar, "endowed with the highest gift for absolution. I am about to make known to him the substance of the report you have committed to me."

"*Bene, bene,*" said the sick man, nodding exhaustedly. "I ask the good father to purge my soul."

The "good father" mentioned had seated himself in an obscure corner, his face bowed and concealed by his hood. The other monk took a parchment from his bosom, and referred to it.

"These are the depositions," he said softly, "of one Andrea Sfondrati, late page to his

Holiness Alexander VI. The man died recently under suspicion of poison, and the document came into the hands of Balatrone here."

"I stole it from his chamber," declared the patient, in a tremulous but resolved voice, "after I had poisoned him. None but I and he knew of its existence. It is all true. No alternative was left me."

"Continue," said the seated monk passionately. "Continue, brother. So far this implies nothing beyond your province."

The Benedictine, unperturbed, unfolded the parchment.

"The statement, Father," he said, "covers the night of his late Holiness's mortal sickness, which in a few hours left the throne of St. Peter vacant." He glanced significantly towards the other, who silently motioned him to proceed. "There were present with his Holiness on that occasion," he went on, "his son the Don Cesare Borgia and his Eminence the Cardinal Adriano of Corneto. The narrator takes up the tale at the moment when a certain dish was placed before his Eminence during the feast served privately in his honour."

He shifted, so as to get the light upon the

document, and began to read in a clear, low voice :

“ ‘ We all knew well enough,’ says Sfondrati, ‘ what was going to happen. When I took the dish from Torelli at the door, I thought to myself, “ Here ensues a vacancy in the Sacred College.” There had been so much purring and fondling, such solicitude about the Cardinal’s health, such brotherly frankness, such plans for the morrow. That was the Borgia way, the one they always followed by choice. Though they might cut throats under provocation, to take a man by the hand, to praise and flatter and applaud him, to caress his prosperous fatness, as it were, while studying in his face the working of the poison they had already insinuated into his belly—that was the sport of sports to them. And this Cardinal had loggias and vineyards and much oil and corn. He was a wealthy prince, a succulent mouthful, and it was his turn to be swallowed. “ How,” I thought, “ can any one, not a credulous ass, be brought to commit himself to these gloved tigers? Has not Corneto heard, like the rest of us, of the Orsini, of Vitellozzo, of Oliverotto, of brother Gandia and brother-in-law Biseglia, of Peroto, the Holy.

Father's little favourite, whose wisand was split by Cesare as he clung screaming to the arms of his old patron? Has he not heard of these and a hundred others ; of the mysterious illnesses, of the stabs in the dark, of the bodies tipped into the Tiber, of that charcoal-burner, witness to Gandia's murder, who excused himself for not having reported the matter to the Governor on the ground that such affairs had grown too common o' nights to excite interest? Has he not heard, in short, of these Spaniards their little ways, that he can thus voluntarily venture himself within reach of their covetous grip? Or does he throw up the game in despair, and yield his money-bags incontinent to the Vatican exchequer?"

" ' I judged his Eminence wrongly, as the sequel will show ; but the belief was in me at the moment, and pretty contemptuously, that the man was a fool.

" ' Well, I took the dish, I say, from Torelli, and Nicandro took it from me. We were supping in the garden-house, in Apollo's bower, for the month was August ; and Nicandro was our Ganymede and little Lisetta our Hebe. They made a pretty couple, and may have shared

something less than a shirt between them. Nicandro placed the dish before his Eminence. It was confetti of creamed fruit, and a perfume like ambrosia rose from it. I had never seen the handsome, devilish face of Don Cesare look more gentle and ingratiatory than it did at that moment. Its expression put to rebuke the Holy Father's, which was as sick and flabby as a skinned calf's. The old devil had not the nerve of his whelp—that is the truth. The dish was placed before his Eminence, I say, and its fellow before each of the other two.' "

"He was the very maestro of confetti, that cook," broke out the sick man feebly from his couch. "His designs in gilt and coloured sugar were sheer masterpieces!"

The monk glanced dumbly at him a moment, then continued his reading :

"Lisette hung over the Cardinal, with the flagon of wine in her hand. Her bosom pressed his neck ; she laid her cheek upon his bald head, and, so standing, filled his glass. But Corneto put neither his hand to the dish nor his lips to the beaker. Instead he rose, and so suddenly that he bruised the child's lips.

"Blood!" said Cæsar softly, and with a smile. "That is a harsh retort on love, Prince."

“ ‘ Then, in one instant, I recognised that I had misjudged his Eminence, that he knew or guessed, and that a crisis was upon us. His eyes were like black glass in stone ; he looked into the black, excited eyes of his host. The two white, black-eyed faces, the one awful, the other wet and piteous, opposed each other.

“ ‘ “ Is it your will, Borgia, that I eat of this dish ? ” he said.

“ ‘ The Pope strove to reply, and no word could he articulate. But his son answered for him : “ What distemper is this, Corneto ? Come, rally thee, man, nor leave the feast uncrowned. One effort more ; see, we will give thee the lead ! ”

“ ‘ He ate himself, and made his father eat. When the two were finished, the Cardinal addressed the Pope. “ God forgive thee, Borgia,” he said, “ and prosper thy design for all its worth.” And he, in his turn, ate of his sweet, and flung the dish from him. “ *Consummatum est,*” he said. “ I have my peace to make with Heaven. I crave your Holiness’s permission to withdraw.”

“ ‘ Now Don Cesare rose laughing, and rallying their guest for his weak stomach, saw him

for a distance through the gardens and then himself returned. And there were we, the frightened witnesses, whispering half tearful now the thing was done, yet dreading that he should see and resent our tremors.

" But the Pope sat staring with a ghastly face ; and Don Cesare sat down beside him, and the two fell murmuring together. And suddenly, in one moment, his Holiness uttered a mortal cry : " Corneto, I am poisoned ! He hath retorted on us with our own ! "

" It was true. The Cardinal, well foreseeing his fate, had prevailed, by bribes and prayers and promises, over the conscience of his Holiness's cook, and had induced the man to serve to his masters the poison intended for himself. The Borgia took the Borgia's own prescription, and died that night in torture. Cæsar hung between hell and earth awhile, and presently escaped. This is all true as I record it.' "

The monk ceased reading, and looked towards the couch. For a little no sound broke the stillness but the faint gasping of the patient and the noisome droning of a fly about the room.

" Balatrone ? " whispered the Benedictine.

" I was that cook ! " cried the dying man in a fearful voice. " Sfondrati read my secret, and

recorded it, and bled me with it till he ruined me. I had to poison him to still his tongue and secure the record."

The seated monk arose, and came with a fierce stride to the bed.

"Thou hast killed a Pope," he said. "Yield up the secret of that poison—the Borgia death."

"Absolve me first."

"None but a Pope can do that."

"Then I must take it with me to the grave."

"Hark ye, fellow—I am Julius; I am the Pope."

"It is his Holiness indeed, Balatrone," cried the friar.

The man screamed and writhed.

"It is the foam of swine, poisoned with arsenic and then whipped to frenzy. Absolve me, Holy Father, absolve me!"

"Ha!" exclaimed the Pontiff, in the voice of a long-covetous man satisfied.

He heard a choke behind him, and turned to find the girl close by. His face softened. "What, little Hebe," he said. "Wouldst like to come and serve the wine to Papa Julius? But, wait."

He turned, with hand uplifted, to give the blessing; but Balatrone was dead.

“ DEAD MAN’S PLACK ”

ELFRIDA, wife of Athelwold, the King’s favourite, and daughter and heiress to Olgar Earl of Devonshire, was a beauty of the true Helena complexion. To see her, for most men, was to covet ; to possess her, for the one, was to wear a crown of exquisite thorns. The orchard needs most watching when the fruit is ripe, and Elfrida hung at perpetual ripeness, maddening to parched lips without. The keeper of this garden of sweet things might hardly enjoy it for his fear of robbers. And the worst of it was that, to maintain so ravishing a possession in its perfection, no warning as to its own irresistible witchery must be so much as hinted to it, lest the blue innocence of two of the most lovely wondering eyes in the world should be impaired thereby, and self-consciousness usurp in them the place of *naïveté*. Gazing into those artless depths, if one had the privilege, one

presently recognised in their little floating motes and shadows the souls of the many who had drowned themselves therein. Was Elfrida conscious of the tragic secrets hidden away under those azure waters? Her husband at least thought her the most loving, the most unsophisticated, the most trustworthy of wives; and if the wish was very particularly the father to the thought, the thought was none the less for that sincere.

One noon the young wife sat, yawning and a little *ennuyé*, in her bower of the Thanage house by Harewood Forest in Hampshire. Athelwold was with the Court at Winchester, and time hung heavy on her hands. She leaned back in her seat, listlessly conning the crumpled figure of Daukin, the Earl's clerk or bookesman, as he squatted on his stool monotonously mouthing the Canons of Eusebius from an illuminated manuscript—the light literature of England when Dunstan was Primate. Like many ethereal women, Elfrida found a fascination in the deformed and grotesque. She petted little harsh Daukin; and he, while he took his full sardonic change of the licence allowed him, for ever in spirit kissed the beautiful feet that

trampled on his soul. So, he thought, must feel the writhing, adoring, hopeless serpent under Mary’s feet in the chapel.

She broke in upon his reading, suddenly and irrelevantly.

“ Will our lord return this night, think you, Master Bookesman ? ”

The dwarf, closing the manuscript, accepted grimly the moral of his own eloquence.

“ Will a star shoot out of the east ? ” he said.
“ I’ll tell thee when the night hath come and gone.”

“ Nay, say that you think he will—say it, say it ! ”

“ The King loves the Earl, lady, and thou desirest him. Which passion shall pull the stronger ? ”

“ Do not *I* love him, thou toad ? ”

“ Well, then, pull, and in double harness ; so, belike, the King, that holds to him, shall be drawn too.”

“ I do not desire the King.”

“ God give him strength to bear it ! ”

She laughed musically : “ Insolent ! ” and so fell into thought.

“ Thou knowest, Daukin,” she said presently,

" I have never been to Court—nor desired it indeed. Of what complexion is the King? "

" Hot."

" Is he not very young? "

" He hath learned to lisp and help himself to what he wants. The young husbands in his suite observe discretion."

" Poor husbands ! O, Daukin, O, waly me, how the day loiters ! If my love could draw so strong, I'd e'en take the worser for the better's sake."

" Which first ? "

" Peace, fool ! "

" Well, the comfort is the King's heard of thee, and heard enough to satisfy him, it seems. He'll not trouble thee with a visit."

" He has not heard."

" What ! Did he not use his influence with the Earl thy father to promote this match ? "

" Aye, on grounds of policy and fortune. Thank Heaven I am not beautiful ! "

" It listens and will record."

She sighed : " Alack, a doleful day ! O, I wish my lord would come ! "

A bugle sounding without answered on her word. There was a thud of racing hoofs, a

sudden turmoil in the court, a mingling of many voices, servile or peremptory. Elfrida rose ecstatic, clasping her hands.

“ ‘Tis he himself ! ” she cried, and advancing, as the curtain parted, almost ran into the arms of her husband Athelwold.

He was tall, sinewy, pale-haired and lashed. His tunic of fine cramasie was torn, his gold garters trailed ; he looked like a man in the last extreme of haste and agitation. He took the wondering beauty in his arms, and gazed into her face, searchingly, passionately.

“ Wife,” he said, “ I have something of wild urgency for thy ear. I must speak it ere my blood cools. Tell me that thy heart is mine ? ”

“ Athelwold ! What questions ! ”

“ Tell it, tell it ! ”

“ Am I not thy wife ? ”

“ Priests’ business. I speak of love.”

“ Why, did I not swear to love thee ? ”

“ Elfrida, thy love’s my heaven ; without it—hell. Hear my confession. There’s no moment to lose.”

“ Thou strange husband ! ”

“ When I first saw thee in thy father’s house I saw my destiny. Such immortal beauty, child

—God, I was just man ! Forgive the mad cunning jealousy that would deceive thee even in thyself. ‘I must possess,’ I thought, ‘this immortal thing or die.’ I bid for thy rank, thy fortune, in pretence, the King upholding my suit. His interest turned the scale, and we were wed. Elfrida, wife, dear love—I wronged the King in all ; I was no more at first than his deputy for thy hand.”

A little spot of white had come to her cheek ; but she smiled on him, not stirring.

“ How, Athelwold ? ”

“ I must confess it,” he said. “ Edgar had heard speak of this lovely Devon rose ; and, toying, only half-inclined, with a thought of matrimony, sent me, on some feigned mission, to discover if the lady’s beauty really matched her nobility—in which case——”

“ Yes, Athelwold ? ”

He held her convulsively. “ O, forgive me, Elfrida, that I made thee Queen of love, not England ! Thy wealth, thy name, I told him, were the charms that gilded servile eyes—enough, perhaps, for such as I, but for him, lacking the first and best of recommendations. And he believed me, and yielded thee to me.

And now, and now”—he held her from him, his chest heaving, his voice breaking—“ my sin hath found me out—some one hath betrayed me—and he is coming in person to put my report to the proof. Feigning to prepare for his visit, I fled but in time to forestall him by a few hours. Ah, love ! all is lost unless thou lovest me.”

She answered quite softly : “ What am I to do, Athelwold ? ”

“ Do, be, anything but Elfrida. Dress slovenly, speak rudely, soil and discredit thine own perfection.”

“ Substitute another for thy lady.”

They both started, and fell apart. The dwarf, forgotten by the one, unnoticed by the other, had risen from his stool. The Thane’s hand whipped furiously to his sword-hilt.

“ Nay,” said the girl, interposing—“ Daukin is my dog ; Daukin loves me ; Daukin shall speak.”

“ Let the Thane,” said the dwarf, cool and caustic, “ seek his couch on pretence of fever, and let Alse, the cookmaid, receive the King. We be all devoted servants of our house. A little persuasion, a little guile, and the thing is carried.”

"I will go instruct the wench," said Elfrida hurriedly.

She seemed charmed with the idea. She drove her lord to his hiding, with a peremptory laughing injunction that he was not to issue therefrom until summoned by herself; she refused to linger a moment by his side in her excitement. Her eyes had never looked so heavenly-bright and blue.

At eve came the King, with a little brilliant retinue.

But Alse did not receive him. Instead there advanced and knelt at his feet one of the most radiant young beauties his eyes had ever encountered. The violet Saxon hood fell back from her face as she raised it, revealing a sun of little curls bound by a golden fillet. The slender lifted hands, the bright parted lips, most of all the eyes, blue as lazulite and wide with innocence, seemed all as if posed for a picture of Love's ecstasy. The King, young, and lustful, and handsome, with his strong, clean-cut face, stood the speechless one.

"Welcome, lord King," she said in a half-articulate voice, like a child murmuring a lesson.

He raised and kissed her. "Welcome, wife

of Athelwold ! ” he said, and let out a sigh like a man restored from drowning.

But apart stood the dwarf, amazed and sorrowful.

“ She hath deceived us,” he thought. “ What is to be the end ? ”

That night was spent in feasting ; and in the morning came Elfrida to her husband’s couch. Worn with fatigue and anxiety—since she had given orders that none was to approach him—he had fallen asleep at last.

“ Up, up, my Thane ! ” she cried. “ The King is bent on hunting, and awaits thee in the court. Say nothing. All goes well.”

She would not linger, lest, as she whispered, she should risk discovery ; but, running from him, sought her bower. There listening, a hand upon her bosom, she heard the chase ride forth ; and presently the dwarf stole in to her.

“ Thou hast done it,” he said. “ The King will kill him.”

She began : “ Dog ! Thou darest——” but, checking herself, put her hands a moment to her face, then went up and down, up and down, like one distracted.

“ Well, he wronged the King,” said Daukin.

She stopped before him, and his soul struggled against the fascination of the blue waters.

"What was that to his wrong of me?" she said passionately; and, as he gazed, he saw the waters brim. "O, Daukin!" she wept; "cannot *you* understand me?"

"Yes," he said.

"And love me still?"

"I can love the truth," he said, with a heart-broken sigh. "I have found it at last in the depths I have studied so long."

When the King returned, the sternness of his white face belied his uttered commiseration. The Thane, he told his lady, had stumbled on his own boar-spear, and met with a mortal hurt.

"Long live the Queen!" said Daukin.

Edgar started, and his hand went to his dagger. Elfrida stumbled forward.

"No," she said, in a weak voice, "it is my dog, lord King. I will not have him killed because he barks."

THE EXECUTIONER OF NANTES

WHEN Carrier, commissioned by Heraut Seychelles, acting on behalf of the Committee of Public Safety in Paris, to *purge* Nantes, arrived in that town, he found all ready to his hand a Revolutionary Committee such as his heart, or whatever deformity represented that organ, could most desire. There were Goullin, Grandmaison, Chaux, Jolly, Perrochaux, and a score others, all "intrepid" Mountain men, and all scoundrels of the most atrocious antecedents. His task was consequently a simple one. He had merely to produce his credentials and authorise his instruments, and the depopulating process started, as it were, automatically. One need not recapitulate, for the thousandth time, a selection from the infernal wickednesses perpetrated by these fiends. Such were being enacted, in more or less degree, in a hundred other districts of the tortured land, and these were noteworthy in

nothing but their multitude. What *was* noteworthy, however, was the fact that Nantes produced the solitary instance—so far as one may gather throughout the entire Revolution—of a butchering devil succumbing to a sense of his own enormities. But, even so, there was to be observed a particular judgment in the case.

Carrier's theories of political economy were simplicity itself. The population of France, he declared, was out of all proportion with the amount of food the land could produce; wherefore he proposed, for his individual part, to pare down the population until it corresponded with the yield. But this decimating process was fatiguing, and called for some compensation. It was only decent that the killers should be allowed to extract what profit and enjoyment they could from their task. And, in fact, they enjoyed a glut, which was the reason why a good many personable women, not of the first order of attractiveness, were allowed to escape—to the scaffold, or to the drownings.

Amongst these came one day to the Place du Buffay, where the guillotine was erected, a mother and her five daughters and their little maid, all, according to a chronicler, *jeunes et*

belles, condamnées sans jugement. There was a good batch that noon, and the seven were kept waiting for a long half-hour at the foot of the scaffold before their turn came. The populace was not yet so hardened but that it could witness this tragedy with emotion. "Ah, the poor infants! But what is their crime?" "Hush! they were taken with arms in their hands!" "My God! but it is outrageous! Are knitting-needles arms?" "I know not, I. It is Carrier who decides."

The six encouraged one another amidst tears and embraces. Most of all they sought to fortify the little *bonne*, who, a mere large-eyed child, stood quite stunned with the turn affairs had taken. When at length the period came to their agony, they mounted the steps in succession, faltering to one another sweet hymns of consolation, their voices fading away one by one like the lights in Tenebrae. The spectators were dissolved in tears; in the midst of a weeping silence the rush and thud of the axe was the only sound audible. Stolidly, monotonously, Jules Garreau, the executioner, a powerful, black-bearded man, sliced off the heads as they came through the "little window." He might

have been cutting chaff for any concern he showed.

The little maid came last. She understood things least of all at that moment, and only cried like a child when the assistants jerked her roughly down on the board and slid her under the yoke. And then, in the very instant that Garreau mechanically touched off the knife, the man was seen to stagger and fall back, his hands flung to his face.

He died the next day in a raving delirium. "It is no wonder," whispered the less inhumane of those who had witnessed the execution. "The pity of it would have killed a wolf's heart."

That was the truth, but not the whole of the truth. The full explanation was not given until years afterwards, when the story was communicated to a priest to whom one of Garreau's assistants came to unburden himself. He knew all about the man and the reason for his death. It had been actually due, he declared, to an instantaneous realisation of the terrific part he was playing, and of the mortal hazards he had invited in lending himself to it. In that moment he had known his soul as surely lost as if he had heard God's voice in his ear, and the shock had

killed him. But it will be well to give the story in the narrator's own words :

" I had known this Garreau since we were young men together. We were in the same office, a wine merchant's, in the Isle Feydeau. Garreau was a very handsome fellow, but as headstrong as the devil. He had a great tenacity of purpose, and when once he had set his heart on a thing, he would pursue it, as a weasel follows a rabbit, until he could set his teeth in its neck. We had no quarrel with the existing order, and our lives were, for our position, prosperous and content. For my part, I was always a slave to the stronger will of my comrade.

" We were at that time good children of the Church, which was indeed our misfortune, for the change in us dated from the moment of Garreau's return from a week's retreat in the monastery of St. Pierre de la Roche. He had acquired therein something other than the religious serenity he had gone to seek, had meditated a passion remote from that of the Testament. It happened in this way.

" Attached to the monastery was the Convent of the Bon Secours, whose sisters washed the

linen of the ghostly fathers. To one of these sisters, a beautiful neophyte, Jules found himself instantly attracted. His interest ripened into desire, and his desire into a devouring passion. From that moment all was decided. He never rested until he had secured its object to himself.

"He would have married the lovely apostate, but the Church refused to sanction their union. It was that refusal which first inspired his recusancy, and in consequence mine. I admired and looked up to him in all things. A child, a girl, was born to the thus ostracised pair, and it was remarked that a little torn heart, emblematic of her birthright of sin, was printed on the innocent's neck under her hair. It was the rending of the Sacred Heart which she was thus made to symbolise in her birth.

"But Garreau loved her, and far more than her mother did. If he had been great, aristocratic, he would have experienced no difficulty in sheltering his mistress from slander and persecution; but he was neither, and he could give her little of the protection that she craved. So in the end she sought and found it in the arms of the Comte de Chasles, son of a marquis, who carried her off to Paris. It was then that

Jules and I attached ourselves to the party of the advanced thinkers.

" He followed the seducer, and for years I lost sight of him. In the meanwhile all that I knew of his affairs was that the infant had been claimed as their perquisite by the sisters of the Bon Secours, and that they were training her, ignorant of her parentage, to service. Then, in a clap, came the Revolution.

" All society was disintegrated in that shock. Institutions ceased to exist and order resolved itself into chaos. The religious houses were the first to suffer. The hour of the great retribution had struck, and I sided with the extremists. And presently arrived Carrier.

" I was out of employment, as who was not? The beneficent Republic provided idleness for us all ; but, alas ! idleness begot no bread. At this juncture the Revolutionary Tribunal called for candidates for the post of executioner. It was their purpose to strip the office of prejudice, and exalt it to a State dignity. This headsman was to be entitled for the future the People's Avenger.

" There were many applicants, and among them came one whom I had difficulty in recog-

nising at first for my old friend and leader Jules Garreau. It was thirteen years since we had met. Most of that time he had spent in the prison of la Force in Paris, whither he had been conveyed on a process for debt ingeniously devised against him by the Comte de Chasles. When released at length by the Revolution, he went, like that weasel before-mentioned, straight for the neck of his enemy. It was at the Abbaye that he found him, and he took what revenge he could for that long term of suffering out of the September massacres. Afterwards he drank blood awhile in Paris, and then came on to his native town to surfeit his hatred on the social order which had been responsible for his ruin. He was by then rabid among the rabid. His deadly sense of wrong had killed whatever spirit of humanity had once existed within him. His only desire was to kill, and kill, and yet kill. This post offered him such an opportunity for the satisfaction of his lust as could be found nowhere else, and he applied for it. He was elected unanimously and with enthusiasm by the National Representatives. All lesser candidates, among whom I figured, waived their claims in view of his, which were irresistible. But he

made me his assistant, and I resumed my natural position of subordinate to him.

" Jules lacked from that moment no food to satiate his vengeance ; and yet it hungered perpetually. He was a dark, powerful man, wholly inexorable, yet in seeming more stern than wrathful. He appeared the Avatar of sans-culottism, a soulless, sightless idol, to whom human flesh had to be sacrificed. Of his child, the pledge of that lost passion, he never seemed to think. Indeed, in the utter annihilation of the religious houses which had occurred it would have been impossible to discover whether she lived or were dead. And perhaps even, one might assume, he did not care. His soul was by now delivered completely over to the one lust of destruction.

" On the day of the execution of the Marcé family we wrought consciously in an unsympathetic atmosphere. It is so sometimes on that platform of the guillotine, as on the stage, when the actor is aware, he does not know why, of an antagonistic presence in the house. One plays then with caution and deprecation, fearing to give offence. I was very sensitive to a throbbing in the popular pulse ; but, as for Jules, he

showed no more sign of feeling than was his wont. Indeed, I observed even an increased callousness in the way in which, noting that the heads were seven, he ticked off each one as it fell with a day from the little nursery proverb uttered *sub voce*, as thus :

“ ‘ Monday, fair of face ; Tuesday, full of grace ; Wednesday, full of woe ; Thursday, far to go ; Friday, loving and giving ; Saturday, work for a living ; Sunday——’

“ With the word on his lips, and his hand in the very act of touching off the bolt, he suddenly paled and staggered. I ran to catch him, and looked straight into the face of one that was damned.

“ It was the last head, and we conveyed Garreau to his lodging. He was by then in a raving fever, from which he never recovered. But in one of the few lucid intervals that came to him he recognised me, and, catching at my hand, whispered in a voice, whose exquisite horror I shall never forget, the secret of his awakening.

“ In the very moment that his fingers released the knife, he had caught sight of a little torn heart printed on the neck beneath him.”

THE LORD TREASURER

"PHINEAS," said the Lord Treasurer—"my breeches!"

The attendant, stooping to the august legs, reverentially relieved them of their small-clothes, and his lordship stood up in his shirt with his back to the fire. Even so denuded, he could never have conceived himself as anything less than a hero to his valet—no, not when, with a comfortable rearward shrug of his shoulders, he lifted the veil of his unspeakableness to the gratifying warmth.

"Let me see, Phineas," said the Lord Treasurer. "To-morrow is Wednesday—the black velvet with the plain falling band, is it not? Very well. Empty that pocket of its papers, Phineas."

"Yes, my lord."

Sir Richard Weston, Baron of Exchequer and Lord High Treasurer to his Majesty King

Charles I., was disrobing for the night in his official residence off Chancellor's or Chancery Lane. He was a man of inflexible routine, who changed his raiment, parcelled out his duties, and pigeon-holed his correspondence with an unswerving regularity from which nothing could ever make him deviate but a bribe. He had a suit of clothes for Monday, a suit for Wednesday, another for Friday, and so on—a change on every third day; and in the doublet of each suit was a little pocket below the waist, into which it was his custom to slip all memoranda of affairs requiring his early attention. This pocket it was the valet's duty to explore upon every occasion of exchange into fresh habiliments.

Now, *system* has this drawback, that it entices those who practise it into a confidence in their inability to err, which is in itself an error. Pigeon-holes are useful things, if one is convinced that every article in them is docketed under its obvious letter. But, alas! in actual fact the short cut too often proves itself the longest way round, and the pigeon has an amazing way of hiding in the unexpected compartment. He may fail to answer to his own name or his firm's, and leave one in the last

resort only his subject or his business by which to trace him—if, indeed, one can identify either under a capital letter. We have known an orderly man to tear the heart out of a nest of pigeon-holes from “B” to “Z,” only at length to find what he sought under “Anonymous.” Yet he remained no less convinced than the Treasurer that he had eliminated confusion from his category of affairs. System, in short, may provide against everything but the bad memory which most trusts to it.

Sir Richard, pleasantly conscious of his calves and upwards, reared himself on his toes and yawned and sank down again.

“Is aught there, varlet?” he demanded.
“Bring me whatsoever it containeth.”

The man laid down the discarded doublet.

“Naught, my lord,” he said, “but a single scrap of paper.”

“Give it me.”

The servant crossed the room, and presented the memorandum with an obeisance. The master accepted it, glanced down, and stood suddenly rigid.

“*Remember Cæsar!*”

That was all—just those two words, written

bold in ink in an unknown hand. “Remember Cæsar ! ”

Sir Richard was holding the paper in his right hand ; dropping the veil, he brought his left to the front and stood staring in a sort of stupor. A consciousness as of chill, as of a sense of warmth and security suddenly and shockingly withdrawn, tingled through his veins. It was succeeded by a faint thrill of grievance or self-pity. He had been so exceedingly comfortable and happy a moment ago.

“ Remember Cæsar ! ”—just those two words, no more, but how voluminous in terrific import ! “ Remember Cæsar ! ” Remember the retribution that always waited on “ vaulting ambition.” A vision of a vast Senate-Hall, of a throng of passionate figures holding aloft blood-stained daggers, of a silent, prostrate form in their midst, rose before him. “ Remember Cæsar ! ” Remember Cæsar’s fate : remember what came to befall the greatest soldier, statesman, jurist of his time—possibly of all time.

A certain flattery in the analogy for an instant restored the colour to Sir Richard’s cheek. Perhaps the comparison was not so extravagant a one after all. The position of Lord Treasurer

was so exalted, that, looking down from it, all lesser offices and all lesser men appeared dwarfed. It needed surely a stupendous intellect to preserve its equilibrium at that altitude. And yet, such the height, such the fall. The Treasurer's momentary heroics came down with an anticipatory thwack which left him gasping.

If he could only avoid Cæsar's fate while admitting the soft analogy! The illustrious Imperator had also, if he remembered rightly, received *his* warning, and had ignored it. To ape the foolhardinesses of the great was surely not to justify one's relation to them in the best sense.

A shrill wind blew upon the casement. Its voice had but now awakened a snug response in the Treasurer's breast. All in a moment it spoke to him of the near approach of the Ides of March, and he shivered and dropped the paper to the floor.

"Phineas," he said in an agitated voice, "Phineas! How came that into my pocket?"

The valet, busy about his affairs, approached deferentially but curiously, and, at a sign from his master, lifted and examined the billet, and shook his head.

" You don't know? "

" No, indeed, my lord."

" How do you read it, man? How do you read it? "

Phineas scratched his poll, and grinned and was silent.

" You are just an intolerable ass," cried his master. He danced in his excitement. His dignity was all gone; he was simply a man in a shirt. " Fetch master secretary! " he cried. " Fetch master comptroller! Rouse the household, and warn the porter at the gate! Send every one in to me, here and at once."

The valet hesitated.

" Do you hear? " shouted Sir Richard.
" Why do you wait? "

" It doesn't come down to your knees, my lord," said Phineas.

The Treasurer leaped to a press and tore out a robe. " Go! " he screamed over his shoulder.

In a minute they all came hurrying in—comptroller, secretary, clerks, grooms, and underlings—in dress or in undress, a motley crew, as the occasion had found them.

" What is it, my lord? " asked the first, in an astonished voice. He was a tall, pallid man,

so inured to method and routine that a rat behind the wainscot was enough to throw him into a flutter.

"Master Hugh," cried the Treasurer—"Master Hugh! I found that in my pocket when I came to strip—a thing that I had never put there, or put unconsciously. What do you make of it, my friend? What does it import?"

They all gathered round the comptroller to read the billet, and, having examined it, fell apart with grave, inquiring faces.

The comptroller looked up, his lips trembling.

"My lord," he said, "it can signify but one thing."

"My assassination?"

"Without doubt, my lord."

The Treasurer turned pale to the bare dome of his head. He had to the last hoped to have his worst apprehensions refuted; but it was plain that only one construction could be put upon the missive.

"How did it reach me?" he said dismally.

"How did it get there?"

"Probably, my lord," ventured the secretary, a sleek, apologetic man, "it was slipped into your lordship's hand by one whom your lord-

ship mistook for a chance importunate suitor, and your lordship accepted and pouched and forgot it."

"It may have represented a threat or a friendly warning," said the comptroller.

"Your lordship hath many and mighty enemies," said the secretary, "as who hath not among the great and influential?"

"Your power, your imperious will, your favour in high places, my lord," said the comptroller—"these be all incitements to the envious and unscrupulous. Without question there is some conspiracy formed against your life."

"I could almost suspect you all of collusion in it," cried the Treasurer bitterly, "for the relish with which you dispose of me."

The comptroller murmured distressfully, "O, my lord, my lord!"

Sir Richard broke out, moved beyond endurance :

"What the devil do you all, moaning and croaking? I am not food yet for your commiseration. The plot may be already forward while you babble. Look under the bed, Phineas."

The valet dived, rose, scoured the room, examined into every possible lurking-place.

" Shall I set a guard, my lord? " inquired the comptroller.

The Treasurer exploded :

" Set a guard when the thief is in ! A household of braying jackasses ! Go, dolt, and remedy your oversight. Shut the gates and warn the porter ; beat up every hole and corner first. See that not a soul is allowed entrance on any pretext whatever. And, hark ye, Master Hugh, no eye to-night shall be shut on penalty of my high displeasure. An unwinking vigil, an unwinking vigil, Master Hugh, on the part of all. See to it. And if any one asks an audience, save of the first consequence and character, I am indisposed, Master Hugh—I am indisposed, do you hear ? "

He was so, in very truth, as he drove them all out, and locked the door upon himself, and sank into a seat before the fire. A sickness of apprehension stirred in his bile and made his face like yellow wax. This business had given him such a shock as he had never before experienced. What did it mean—what could it mean? No doubt the secretary's theory was the right one : he was incessantly being importuned by petitioners, and often, to get rid

of them, he would accept their memorials, and pocket and forget all about them. So must it have been with this paper, thrust into his hand amidst a crowd. It was merciful chance alone that had restored it to his notice before too late. But, accepting all that, *why* was his life threatened? His heart was full of an emotional complaint and protest against destiny. He was not an unjust man as things went—certainly not so signally as to merit this fatal distinction.

He passed a terrible night, shrinking from every shadow, starting at every sound. Morning when it came only added to his sick perplexity. What course was he to pursue, fearful of the lurking terror, to preserve his dignity and his life at once? He dressed in a sort of mental palsy, crept breakfastless to his library, and sent for the comptroller's report. So far, it appeared, the night had passed without event. No doubt the deed was destined for the open air.

As he stood, trying to deliberate his policy, a visitor, the Earl of Tullibardine, was announced as craving an audience. His lordship was a personal friend of his, and beyond suspicion. Reluctantly Sir Richard gave the order for his admittance.

The nobleman came in breezily, and with much concern expressed over the report of the Treasurer's indisposition. "Which," said he, "maketh me loth to trouble your lordship on a personal matter, which, saving the pressure of the occasion, I would forbear. But the business calls for dispatch, and your lordship had promised me an answer."

Sir Richard put a hand to his forehead.

"Not well," he murmured, "and overtaxed. You must pardon me, my lord. What business?"

"Why," cried the Earl, "have you forgot how you promised me three days ago to speak to the King about appointing my kinsman, Robert Cæsar, to a vacant clerkship of the Rolls, and how, asking me for a memorandum of the matter, I writ '*Remember Cæsar*' on a slip of paper and gave it you?"

Sir Richard stood staring a moment, then burst into an uproarious laugh.

MARGARET OF ANJOU.

THE sun was setting over Hexham in Northumberland as the last remnants of the Lancastrian force broke and scattered before the explosive charges of the Yorkists under Montacute, Warden of the East Marches. Thenceforth all was mad flight and frenzied pursuit. No quarter was given or expected. The hurtling fragments of the rout flew in a thousand directions, to be pursued and overtaken and stamped to extinction where they fell. Steel and flesh and harness, swept into mangled heaps, dotted acres of the country, like manure laid ready for its potent dressing. Hardly a cry or a movement issued from these fermenting masses. Montacute had ordered his work thoroughly, and the chase as it swept on and away had seen to it that the fallen should yield no hangman's perquisites. Only a spark struck out from steel here and there witnessed to

the sharp eviction of a soul betrayed through its agony.

The young May moon stole up and out, and, in sickness at the sight, drew a passing cloud across her face. The horse that, miles away, carried a frantic woman and her child, stumbled in the shadow, and, half recovering itself, and again sinking, pitched its riders upon the turf.

They rose immediately, to find themselves upon the fringe of a dense wood, remote, unknown, but a haven of desperate refuge in their plight.

"Art thou hurt, child?" whispered the breathless woman.

"No, mother."

"Come, then. No other choice is ours but death and outrage. We must take shelter where we can."

She seized his hand—he was a pretty, delicate boy of eleven—and together they entered among the trees. All was strange and voiceless there, yet the leaves were not so full-grown but that the moonlight penetrating might help them a little on their way. It sparkled softly on the woman's girdle, and on her little turbaned cap, and on the jewels, which she had not thought in her haste to remove or hide, clasped about her

white neck ; it peopled the glades with moving phantoms, mystic and watchful. She felt the little hand in hers clutch and quiver, and squeezed it, drearily responsive.

" Better," she said, " these thousand spectres than a single sword of the usurper."

She was only thirty-four, and of those years she had spent five in the Tower. Yet, born as she was a child of sorrow, always the sport of faction, her baby rattle the roll of drums, her games real warriors and real warfare, her indomitable spirit, wasting itself for ever in fruitless struggles and on timorous souls, refused still to acknowledge its own eclipse. She had fought, had she known it, her weak husband's cause to within sight of the end, but the fire in her heart, though in the full front of this disaster, was not yet wholly extinguished. Only a tragic woe lined her beautiful face, and she clung half hysterically to this one shadow out of all her dreams which remained to her.

She had been a child herself when her gentle boy was born. They were even now more like brother and mothering sister than son and parent. What hope remained to her was centred entirely in him and his passionate preservation. She

carried him into the woods, as a frightened wood-cock bears its fledgling, with one only instinct—to put as far and as obscure an interval as possible between their enemies and themselves.

Yet, in the end, worn with grief and terror and the actual fatigues of that bloody day, they faltered and sunk down exhausted at the lip of a little clearing situated but a few hundred yards within the forest-edge. There was a mossy bank there, and on it, under the shadow of a spreading oak-tree, they fell and clung together.

"Neddy, my babe, my little woeful prince!" wept the mother. "There, hide thee thy face within my bosom, and try to sleep. It shall force my bursting heart to still itself to be thy quiet pillow."

The boy obeyed, crying silently. Yet, so it happened that, spent with emotion, in a little a merciful oblivion overtook him, and, listening to his regular breathing as to soft music, the woman too sank presently drowned in a sea of forgetfulness. And there they lay at peace in the quiet night, with moss for their bedding and green leaves for their canopy.

A sense of light, of human neighbourhood, awoke them almost at the same moment, and

they sat up together with a start. It was bright morning in the forest, and three evil, uncouth men stood gloating down upon them.

The woman's heart seemed to stop. The rose and warmth of slumber, mortal lures to villainy, froze upon her cheek. Instinctively her hand stole to the haft of a little dagger stuck at her waist. For minutes dead silence prevailed, and then she spoke, in a voice which strove vainly to command itself :

"Pray you mercy, gentle sirs ! What would you with us ? O, not to betray our weakness ! "

Her very plea was provocation to such cattle —a reassurance and an invitation. She had supposed them, in the first shock of discovery, to be Yorkist soldiers, but a moment's thought had undeceived her. Shaggy, unkempt, grossly attired and rudely armed, there was nothing to associate these with the bearing of regular troops. They were mere prowling reveres of the woods, beasts and marauders, who took their toll of lonely travellers, and ravished and murdered as the chance came to them.

One of the three, a huge, bull-like ruffian, in hood and battered breastplate, rose from the bow on which he leaned, and turned to his comrades.

"What say you, gossips—a pretty finch to pull? Their weakness, sooth! Do we not love all weakness in such guise?"

One, who stood behind in a high scarlet cap, peering over his friend's shoulders, clucked in his throat, and cracked his fingers. He was grotesquely tall, lean, misshapen, with long, hungry chaps and a frosty nose.

"Gossips," he said, in a thin, sharp-set voice, "shall we not pluck this pigeon ere we feast on her? My blood is cold, and sack would be very warming."

The Queen wrenched a gold chain from her arm, and, rising hurriedly, flung it to the ground.

"Take it, in God's pity," she said, "and let us go! Gentlemen—sweet gentlemen! a broken woman throws herself upon your charity. O, teach her that some mercy still remains to men!"

"A's unprotected," said the third fellow, his eyes burning—"likely some little sow that flees and squeaks before the boars of York."

"We'll make her squeak, I warrant," said the first speaker.

The lank creature skipped to the front, and snatched up the chain.

"Drink first," he cried, "drink, drink! I'll

with this to the ‘Chequers’ and return anon with sack.”

The bull-headed man threw himself on him in a fury; in a second they were all fighting together for possession of the chain. The strongest, the first-mentioned, secured it.

“Drink,” he roared. “Much drink, I trow, for those remaining. Trust *thee* the chain, Jake Andrews? Marry I will when Tib’s eve is come.”

The other wriggled, cracking his finger-joints.

“Take it thyself, then, Cuckoo, only speed fast and bring us good store.”

They wrangled yet awhile, but in the end the holder of the chain went off, with threats of fierce reprisals should the two remaining venture to take advantage of his absence. They leered at one another oddly as he disappeared.

“A’ll claim, as ever, the first and the best of everything,” growled the short, thick-set man under his breath.

“Shall he now, Thomas Kite, shall he?” answered the long scarecrow eagerly. Bending with a grotesque writhe, he jerked himself suddenly stiff again, a staring smile on his face. “Cometh our chance long sought, Thomas Kite,” he whispered. “Shall the Cuckoo always claim

the Cuckoo's share? Not if one be quick and clever, gossip."

He squeaked, and leaping, dodged and screwed behind the other. The Queen, knife in hand, her teeth set, her muscles rigid, was almost upon them. As she lifted her arm, the stubby rogue ran under, and caught her round the waist.

She struck and struck at him, but her shortened blows fell harmless. She could not get one home so long as he held her thus, and he knew it and cried out, straining :

"Cut me the whelp's throat, Jake Andrews, and so get behind her."

The boy, terror-struck and whimpering, held to his mother's skirts. With a mortal effort, she wrenched herself free from her captor, and, throwing down her blade, which Jake instantly secured, seized the child convulsively into her clutch.

"No, no!" she cried, "I am disarmed. In God's name spare him! See, we will stand like the wretched sheep, dumbly beseeching your mercy. There, take all I have—my jewels——"

She began, with feverish fingers, to unclasp the collet from her neck. Jake, leering and humping his shoulders, stopped her mid-way.

"What now," growled the Kite ; "shall they not be ours, then?"

"Patience, good gossip, patience!" said the other softly in his ear. "Would not the Cuckoo, returning, note at once their absence, and so be moved to fury? No suspicion, Thomas Kite—none. Lull him, lull him, and then—one blow, and all is ours—wine, jewels, gold, and—hum!" He hugged himself, gluttonously contorted. "Is not a half share better than a third," he said, "or none at all? And as for the little pretty, pleasant tit-bit——"

The Kite roared out suddenly on the captives :
"Down with ye both asquat on grass bank yonder, and move so much as an eyelid at your peril!"

Trembling and distraught, the Queen dragged the boy to a place beside her on the turf, and so, clasped together, they cowered, awaiting the end.

Despair was in her heart. So remote, so utterly unfriended, she knew not where to look for hope or remedy. Cursed and proscribed in the thick of enemies, no self-confession that she might venture but must prove her worst damnation. Outlawed herself, she was the natural prey to outlaws. To reveal her identity were to forgo

the smallest consideration a threat of vengeful justice might otherwise perhaps enforce—were to unmuzzle these ravening beasts finally and effectively. And yet she dared not threaten justice, lest passions so reckless should be fired thereby to instant retaliation.

She could only pray to her gods in a dumb agony of supplication to contrive some means for their escape; for herself she could think of no possible way, unless at the last to snatch death from some ill-guarded weapon.

What long torture of mind she endured while sitting there facing her brutal captors, awaiting the Cuckoo's return and thereafter the final struggle, one may imagine in a measure. A suffocating lump seemed to rise in her throat when at length she heard his footsteps on the twig-strewn turf, and her arm tightened convulsively about her boy.

The returned ruffian, when he hove into sight, had been obviously priming himself for the affray. He was not drunk, but his huge cheeks were blistered red and a fire blinked in his eyes. He carried over his shoulder a net containing a jar of sack and a couple of curved drinking-horns, and, striding across to his comrades, he

bent, with a fierce inquiring oath, to sling his burden to the grass. As he thus stooped, Jake and the Kite, standing on either side of him, drove each a sudden knife, handle-deep, into the thick of his neck. The monster, with one slobbering choke, heaved forward and went down like an ox. His fingers raked, his legs jerked for a little, and then the whole welter relaxed and subsided. Simultaneously with its cessation of movement the two murderers, as if by one impulse, made for the wine-jar. Their hands were shaking, their cheeks spotted with white. They spilled as much as they gained, but each in the end succeeded in gulping a hornful between his chattering teeth. And then!—

The woods echoed with their screeches ; they writhed like scalded snakes upon the grass. For the Cuckoo, coveting not a half but the whole of the spoil, had gone even a step further than his confederates, and had poisoned the wine he brought them with some swift corrosive acid snatched up from the “ Chequers ” harness-room.

Was the biter bit ever mangled with a longer tooth? The pale Queen, risen throughout this bloody drama, watching half-paralysed its course,

with but reason enough left to hold the child's face hidden from it, was even minutes in guessing the truth. But when at length she realised it, with a sob of thankfulness she seized her boy's hand, and, avoiding those prostrate, faintly-gasp-ing horrors, fled deep and deeper into the forest, until, as history relates, she found that chivalrous one whose generosity was to obtain her means to cross the water.

“ KING COLLEY ”

“ WE will now, my dear people,” said Mr. Cibber, “ proceed to investigate the ecclesiastical Phœnix which has reared its giant head from the ashes of the conflagration, and to criticise its claims to a greatness commensurate with its bulk.”

He spoke of St. Paul’s Cathedral, which, in this summer of 1721, had stood some years completed, the stupendous “ monument without a tomb ” to its creator’s genius.

Mr. Cibber had been entertaining a party of provincial actors and actresses to luncheon at the “ Globe ” tavern, in Fleet Street, where, amongst other things, they had consumed a half-gallon of arrack punch at six shillings the quart. The company was in consequence very merry, and, though still properly impressed with the magnitude of the occasion, a little more inclined than heretofore, per-

haps, to familiarity with its host, and even to a touch of that professional sportiveness whose cheap but characteristic quality seems somehow to this day to suggest the missing link, much sought and unaccountably overlooked, between men and monkeys. Mr. Cibber, however, genial as always in self-sufficiency, recked nothing of the change. He walked at the height of pompous good-humour, his usually pasty countenance flushed, his hat under his arm, and his full wig pushed a trifle back from his forehead. He wore a heavily embroidered claret-coloured coat with stiff skirts, buttoned at the waist alone, black velvet breeches, ruffles, and a "bosom" of Mechlin lace, pearl silk stockings with gold clocks, and scarlet heels to his shoes. His magnificence put into the shade the somewhat meretricious finery of his companions, and that was exactly as it should have been. King Colley would have wished to impress upon the public in general the fact that he was merely acting cicerone, in a spirit of tolerant condescension, to certain country insignificances whom it was his humour to patronise, and that there was something a little fine in his taking these humble, unsophisti-

cated souls under his personal protection, and exhibiting to them the lions of the Metropolis.

The party, chattering, laughing, and gaping, went down Fleet Street, and paused a moment at the ruined gateway on Ludgate Hill. It had been gutted by the great fire, but the mutilated statues of King Lud and his sons still remained to its west front. Mr. Cibber pointed out the middle figure.

“King Lud,” he said.

“Lud!” responded Mrs. Lightfoot, and Mr. Barney Bellingham, low comedian, laughed suddenly, and then looked preternaturally solemn.

They were some five or six in all, including a “heavy father” and spouse, “Sweet Corinna,” so called, the most affectedly rapturous of *ingénues*, and the two above-mentioned. Mrs. Lightfoot, a faded coquette in a soiled “paysanne,” had once played Hypolita in the Laureate’s own “She Would and She Would Not,” and could claim some kinship with genius.

“A fabulous monarch,” said Mr. Cibber grandiloquently, “and therefore figuring not inappropriately on the portal, as one might call it, to Pretence. Your servant, sir.”

He addressed a little old gentleman who at that moment had alighted from a chair which had been deposited close beside the speaker. The stranger was the most withered small creature it was possible to conceive—a nonagenarian at least by his looks—a fledgling of second childhood, his head, naked and skinny, in a great wig like a nest. His eyes were dim, his nose was a rasped claw, his fingers were horny talons. He was dressed very plainly, almost like a farmer, in a drab-coloured coat and breeches; and something of rustic vigour showed in the positive sprightliness with which, in spite of his years, he stepped out upon the stones. Mr. Cibber, a practised reader of character, distinguished the country cousin in him at once, and was moved to some affable patronage.

"If you are going our way, sir," he said, "and an arm would be of any service to you? My name is Cibber—Colley Cibber, sir, of whom it is just possible you may have heard."

"O, indeed!" said the old gentleman, with a kindly, nervous lift of his eyes. "Mr. Cibber is it? A very gratifying accident. I must live remote beyond conception, sir, to be ignorant

of that name. Thank you, Mr. Cibber. You were saying, sir, as I alighted——?”

“I was saying, sir,” said the Laureate, “that a fabulous monarch, like him above, fittingly adorns the portal to pretence.”

“Meaning——?” said the old gentleman, pointing forward with his stick.

“Yes, sir,” said Mr. Cibber—“meaning the vast but ineffective fane towards which we are now directing our steps.”

“Ah!” said the old gentleman. “It will have its faults, no doubt.”

“We will consider them,” said the poet loftily. “Is this possibly your first visit, sir? Well, better late than never, as old Heywood has it. You will find much to surprise and more to disapprove, or I am mistaken in myself. I am doing showman at the moment, sir, to a party of country cousins”—he whispered, “plain, unsophisticated folk, but respectable—and if you care to join us——”

“With pleasure, Mr. Cibber,” said the old fellow. “It is a most happy chance for me—and not less for the support of your arm than of your opinion. I thought I should like to approach the Cathedral on foot—to have its

dimensions gradually revealed to me ; but I find in good truth the hill trying to my old bones. I am eighty-nine, Mr. Cibber. Would you believe it ? ”

“ It is a creditable venture, sir,” said the poet. “ Ulysses himself in his old age never made a bolder.”

They approached, as he spoke, the extended space on which the building stood, and divers exclamations of wonder broke from the lips of the little party—“ My stars ! ” “ Prodigious fine, on my word ! ” “ ‘Tis mighty likeable ! ” “ Why—why, the sweetest regale ! ” “ Are you not properly struck, Barney, my boy ? ” “ Mum, mum,” and so on. Mr. Cibber, with the air of one magnificently responsible for the show, stood leaning familiarly against one of the posts which encompassed the paved area before the west door, and remained silent pending the recovery of his company. But he took snuff, and laughed patronisingly from time to time over the fervour of its ejaculations.

“ Rat me, my dears,” he said by and by, when the volume of enthusiasm had spent itself ; “ but your artlessness refreshes me—upon my soul and honour, it refreshes me. This is the very

respectable work of a journeyman builder, and as full of holes as poor Tom's coat."

"La, Mr. Cibber!" said the sweet Corinna, with a giggle, "I always thought the gentleman was at the top of his trade."

"They say best men are moulded out of faults," murmured Mr. Bellingham, with a wink at the heavy mother.

The poet saw the wink, and waxed a little emphatic. It was Dr. Johnson who had once said of his art of conversation that "he had but half to furnish, since one-half was oaths." But he was after all a good-natured man.

"Then, God judge me," he cried, straining his voice, which was none of the strongest, "if he hadn't a title to be called perfection!"

Mrs. Lightfoot, alarmed by his heat, stopped a levity on her lips half-way, and addressed the great man very soberly.

"I prithee, sir," she said, "to correct our untutored visions, naturally dazzled in their first contemplation of so unaccustomed a sight."

"Why, my dear," said the Laureate, mollified at once, "I can quite understand your naïve enthusiasm; but it is a fact that in order to criticise an achievement one must know some-

thing of the principles of the art which designed it."

"No greater architect of his own fortune than King Colley!" cried Mr. Bellingham.

"I thank you, sir," answered Mr. Cibber stiffly; then added, blazing out again, "You will oblige me by holding your damned tongue!"

The old gentleman, anxious and conciliatory, put in a word:

"Your professional knowledge, sir, must make your comments doubly instructive. Pray inform us to what details of the building you take particular exception."

"That is a very reasonable demand, sir," answered the Laureate, daring the offending and rather elated low comedian from the corner of his eye. "I have no doubt that to the uninformed in such matters the magnitude of this conception palliates, or even overpowers, the meretriciousness of its details. But you mistake me on one point. My *profession*, though it embodies all the arts, specialises in none, and if I claim a dictatorial right in this instance, it is simply because as an actor I represent the trinity in unity of the creative faculty."

"I see, I see," said the old gentleman. "It

is merely accident which has kept dormant your architectural proclivities.”

“ Well, sir,” said the poet, with a smile, “ I flatter myself I could have evolved, under compulsion, a more faultless erection than this.”

The stranger nodded with an air of satisfied acquiescence.

“ I shall be really grateful to Mr. Cibber,” he said, “ if he will help me to the right point of view. To my uninstructed intelligence, I confess, the pile seems to stand well.”

The poet laughed tolerantly.

“ A good fortune it owes to its site. O, you must really pardon me, sir ! It is in truth a cold, heavy, tasteless affair, imposing in no more than bulk, lacking the inspiration of sacramentality. Bear with me, now bear with me, while I strip off for your edification a little of the monster’s pretence. You will observe its most prominent feature, the dome? Very well, sir ; that dome sums up in itself the hollowness of the entire conception. It violates the first principles of the art it professes, with a monstrous impertinence, to crown. Its height bears no relation to the proportions of the structure within, and is fixed thus arbitrarily for no other purpose than effect.”

"But is not the effect good?" ventured the old gentleman.

"Why, stab my vitals, sir!" said Mr. Cibber, "have you the assurance to condone a whitened sepulchre? The greater the audacity, the worse the pretence. The cupola proper to this design lies within that external sham like a head under a steel basinet. What we look on is a mere exuberance, supporting nothing but itself. Will you tell me that that is in accordance with the principles of art, which demand that each part should naturally progress in lines of beauty from the parent stock?"

"No," said the stranger—"no. You teach me much, sir."

"That pretence," continued the poet triumphantly, "is not confined to the head, though naturally it finds there its most swollen expression."

"By the Lord, that's true," murmured Mr. Bellingham, and the sweet Corinna choked a little laugh into her handkerchief.

"Those side elevations, for instance," went on Mr. Cibber, with a doubtful glance askance at the lady, "concealing as they do the buttresses and clerestory windows of the nave, constitute

in their upper order a mere mask to the real form and construction of the building. Now, in a perfect design there should be no screening of structural necessities, but an ingenious adaptation of all such to the general conception. These, sir, are a few of the most patent defects, upon which, saving your patience, I could enlarge at pleasure. But I trust I have said enough to correct your point of view to its necessary focus; and if some disenchantment is the result——”

“ Well, well, Mr. Cibber,” interrupted the old gentleman—“ well, well. But I don’t know that I can quite confess to that.”

“ O, very good, sir!” cried the poet ironically. “ And according to what impenetrable illusion, if you please, do you persist in your faith?”

“ Why,” said the old gentleman—“ why, you see, Mr. Cibber, I designed the thing myself.”

“ Sir Christopher, Sir Christopher!” cried a breathless gentleman who came hurrying up at the moment. “ We had lost you, sir. This was naughty of you to venture up the hill alone.”

Mr. Bellingham, with one look at the rueful Laureate, sat flat down upon the pavement and delivered himself to hysterics.

THE SURGEON OF GOUGH SQUARE

HE was a young man, but appearing careworn and prematurely aged. His face had a spoiled and dingy look such as an actor's bears by daylight, when for the paint and glow and glamour of the boards are substituted the grey and gripping realities of existence. The fruitlessness of all hope, of all cheery effort, seemed typified for him in the stagnant November fog which brooded over the City without. As he gazed through his window into the dreary murk, the dull roar which reached his ears from Fleet Street and its adjacent market sounded to him like the boom of surf to a castaway in a desolate land. He was stranded, he felt, among the waste places of life, and no prospect of release was ever more to be his.

He had started his professional career with high expectations and a confidence born of capital possession. They had all, hopes and

confidence and capital, gone to wreck on the shoals of a giant fraud. What solace to him was it that the law had ended by claiming its own? It had been a greater mercy had it remained eternally blind, and left him, one of many victims, to live on content in his fool's paradise. Though his substance had been dissipated, the interest, regularly paid, had served him for his needs. It had been all the sinews he desired in his wrestle with fortune. Was it not in the bitter irony of things that his high rectitude should be expected to rejoice in that vindication of justice which had left him a pauper?

He recalled, in a sudden impotent fury, the occasion, or the suspected occasion, which had marked him down for ruin. His capital had been all invested in Bank of England stock, and the securities had been deposited with Fauntleroy, the now notorious banker of Berners Street. It had been this villain's practice to forge powers of attorney enabling him to dispose of his clients' property, and the man's cool audacity had even, it was said, carried him so far as to the occasional appending of a customer's name to a fraudulent deed in the customer's own presence, and the then sending it, with its ink still

wet, as though from the visitor's hand, into the clerks' department.

Such, he fully believed, had been the case with him during a business call he had made one day upon the head of the house. He remembered, cursing the memory, the sleek, plausible figure in its black tights and broadcloth, the spotless frill at its bosom, the smile on its prosperous face, the pen travelling in its plump fingers while the voice went on, even, polite, and interested. To be signing away so inhumanly the fortune, the happiness, the soul of a fellow-creature, and never all the while to flush or falter. Damn him !

Well, he was damned maybe. A glutton, a sybarite, a voluptuary, he had come to the end of his feasting, and only for Lazarus remained the scraps and dregs of the banquet.

A rap at the door broke in upon his miserable reverie, and a small servant entered the room. Two gentlemen, she said, desired particularly to see him. Who were they? She did not know, they would give no name. Where were they? In the surgery, which opened on the back. They had brought *something* with them; *something* on a hand-cart, and then other men, who

had deposited the something, had left. She was used to the traffic, or had been, and showed no agitation or alarm.

Resurrection-men ! He had no desire to pay their price, and, if he had, no means. The very house in which he lived, an inheritance, was already under treaty for sale. Frowning and compressing his lips, he descended to the room below. The *something*, stark and obvious under a black cloth, was laid already on the dissecting-table. Two gentlemen turned to greet him.

They were both grave, formal, unconvincing ; yet perfectly refined in manner. One, who constituted himself the spokesman, began to address him at once in a low voice :

" You will please to pardon, sir, on the ground of extreme urgency, this unceremonious visit. I must say at once that we do not wish to state our names, and I will admit unhesitatingly that we are disguised. This"—he signified the silent shape—" is the subject of our visit. We desire your acceptance of it in the interests of science. No return is required, and no condition made, save that you undertake to convince yourself, beyond the possibility of a doubt, and before proceeding to extremities, that no flicker of life survives to it."

Professionally self-possessed, the young doctor had yet to rally all his nerve-power to meet so amazing a charge. He delayed to answer for some moments.

"And if it did?" he said.

"Then you will have no reason to regret your caution," answered the gentleman.

"I cannot pretend to understand you."

"I must urge upon you the necessity of a quick decision," said the stranger. "Will it satisfy you to be told that the subject"—he again pointed to the hidden form—"expressly desired that this task should be deputed to you?"

"Are you mad?" said the young surgeon, "or am I, or do you think me so? What task—and who desired it?"

"The task," said the gentleman, "of ascertaining, in the first instance, that life is indisputably extinct, and of then devoting the remains, at your complete discretion, to the interests of science. I may tell you"—he seemed to hesitate a moment—"that the subject suffered under a morbid apprehension of premature burial."

"His apprehensions," said the surgeon, "could be easily set at rest."

"I hope so," answered the stranger.

"But—but," cried the surgeon in desperation—he made a movement as if clutching at his hair—"you must see, gentlemen, that I cannot possibly undertake the responsibility on these vague premises."

"Question me, sir, if you will, and I will endeavour to answer to your satisfaction."

"Tell me then. Who is this man? What was his complaint—presumably mortal? Was he a patient of mine that he selected me for this extraordinary business?"

The gentleman again seemed to hesitate.

"He was," he said, "—yes, I may call him a patient of yours, inasmuch as you attended him during the course of a distemper or aberration with which he was seized. He considered that he owed you a return for his somewhat cavalier exploitation of your services, and, at the last, these were the only means he could devise for giving some effect to—well, shall we call it his remorse? The sentiment, combined with the fact that his demise, or his assumed demise, occurred in this neighbourhood, decided our choice."

The young surgeon, forcing all his wits to a focus, fixed his eyes searchingly on the speaker.

"He was murdered," he said. "Is that it?"

The other shrugged his shoulders, with a scarce perceptible smile.

"O, sir," he said, "if you take that view ! But a moment's examination will convince you."

"Let me make it, then."

The stranger interposed his body, quietly but resolutely.

"After we are gone."

"Why will you not give me your names ? "

"Because, sir, we do not wish to associate ourselves with an act which might prove difficult of explanation, and which, given publicity, must most certainly defeat its own object. You must accept our word for it that we were both close personal friends of the deceased, and that we have undertaken this difficult charge out of pure regard for an intimacy which contains for us many endearing recollections."

"What was the cause of death ? Will you tell me so much ? "

"It was the result of a fall."

The surgeon, wavering between conscience and professional acquisitiveness, gnawed his forefinger in an agitated way.

"But why," he said—"why should not a post-mortem examination at his own house have sufficed for his apprehensions ? "

"There is no calculating," answered the stranger, "the lengths to which such diseased imaginativeness will carry a man. Safety, no doubt, to his mind, consisted in nothing short of dismemberment." He looked at his watch in a hurried way. "Time, sir," he said, "presses. If our natural scruples shrink, as I say, from association with this business, no such sentiment need apply to you. Gentlemen of your profession, I understand, are not expected to be over-inquisitive as to the material provided for their anatomical studies. You may rest completely satisfied that nothing discreditable to ourselves or harmful to you attaches to this case. Very well. Subjects, I believe, are costly. Here is one to your hand for nothing. But should our friend's terrors prove actually justified, and this to be a case of suspended animation, in that event, sir, I will answer for it that the patient's gratitude would take a form upon which you would have plentiful reason to congratulate yourself. And in the meantime every wasted minute is a reproach to us. Answer, sir, will you accept the conditions or not?"

"You will not tell me your name?"

"No."

"Nor his there?"

"I must not, indeed."

"Nor where to communicate with you, in case——?"

"No purpose would be served thereby. We have done what he desired of us, and there our duty to him ends. The rest lies between you and him."

The surgeon, with a gesture which might have implied resignation or repudiation, turned his back. When he looked round again he was alone.

He made a movement towards the door, as if in a pretence to himself to recall his visitors, but stopped on the instant, biting his lip.

"I will not be such a hypocrite," he muttered. He knew perfectly well, indeed, what was at the bottom of his heart—hope; a vague, indefinable feeling that all here was not as intimated; that out of the very strangeness and mystery of the affair might come profit and perhaps salvation to himself, a desperate man.

With a somewhat haggard face he moved on tiptoe to lock both the surgery door and that leading into the yard at the back. Then, feeling awed against his will, he turned to the hidden form.

It was still early morning, but the fog made a thick, dingy twilight in the room. Not a sound broke the dead stillness ; nothing moved.

Yes, something—the thing under the cloth !

Was he overwrought—victim to some wild delusion ? He could have sworn it ; and yet the motion had been so slight, so hardly perceptible, it might have been the mere contraction or dilation of a shadow.

Again !

With a gasp of horror he leaped to the table, tore away the cloth, and revealed the face, blotched and livid, of Fauntleroy the forger.

The truth rushed upon him as he stood there, pallid and staring, and with it an understanding of each one of his visitor's studied ambiguities. The great criminal, he remembered now, was to have been executed that morning. Where had he heard it—that whisper, that incredible rumour, hinting of a hangman extravagantly bribed by friends of the criminal, and of a silver tube to be passed into the condemned gullet ? A thing impracticable—preposterous—he had dismissed it as a canard ; yet, somehow, it appeared, accomplished. Either that way or another—what did it matter ? The man had been

hanged, patently on the evidences before him, and as patently he still lived—only as yet the merest flicker of vitality, expressed in the pulsing of the purple œdematosus swelling about the throat. A little either way, and the spark were coaxed into flame or quenched for ever.

Which way, then? He stood for minutes, quite rigid, battling with his emotions. His wrongs ; his diabolical opportunity ; his perfect immunity from detection ; his justification, inasmuch as this life was already forfeit to the law. Hyde roared in him, and Jekyll pleaded. The very clothes of the thing, unaltered in their black neatness, sleekness, hypocrisy, filled him with an indescribable loathing. He stepped forward, his fingers crooked.

At that moment the laugh of a baby sounded in the yard outside. He paused, and stood listening. Suddenly his face lightened :

“ Not guilty ! ” he cried, “ not guilty, little one ! ” and hurried to the succour of his enemy.

THE PRIOR OF ST. COME

A CADAVEROUS, hump-shouldered man paced a walk of the Louvre garden. He would have been pronounced old, though, in fact, his years were no more than fifty. In form and expression he was the typical miser, lean and grey from abstinence, morose from suspicion, bent from persistent crouching over insufficient embers. His face was tallow grey ; the whites of his eyes and the orifices of his long, pinched nose were tinged with red. He was dressed in a short, waistless jerkin, once black, and trimmed at the hem with mangy fur, once brown. Black, ill-gartered hose covered to the hips a couple of legs like hurdle-stakes, and his stooped head was cased in a greasy calotte, surmounted by that form of cap known as the cap of maintenance, the brim of which, peaking to the front and raised behind, supported a number of little

cheap leaden figures of saints. In contradiction to all this ostentatious shabbiness, a collar of gold shells and costly jewels hung about his neck.

As he paced deliberately, his hands clasped behind his back, his lips perpetually working without sound, he would glance up with a stealthy leer from time to time at a figure that walked beside him. This figure, sufficiently jocund and prosperous for contrast, was that of a healthy priest in cape and cassock, with a crisp, golden beard and blue eyes, a certain craft in which rather belied their conscious merriment. An odd broadness of the skull above the ears, which were gross and misshapen, betokened in this person a development of what Spurzheim would have called an "affective propensity to acquisitiveness." He was, however, a notoriously holy man, and one of the King's chaplains to boot. The other was the King himself, Louis XI.

Presently the latter, pausing beside a pedestal on which stood a statuette, none too unsuggestive, of the Paphian Venus, looked up in an abstracted way.

" Still vacant, still vacant? " he said, lisping a little between his toothless gums. " That was

what you remarked, was it not, Père Bonaventure? ”

“ Not in so many words, son Louis,” answered the chaplain. “ But in very truth the Priory of St. Come remains to this day a body without a head. The severance, moreover, hath endured so long that I doubt if any reunion of the parts, were that conceivable, could restore its healthy circulation to the community. The good prior and his monks have become estranged in this dull interval. His authority is out of date. Were he yet to return—a wild hypothesis—he would think to take them up where he left them, and, being disillusioned, chaos would result.”

“ You are convinced he is dead? ”

“ Either that, or held by the infidels in a captivity doomed to be perpetual. No reasonable man can doubt it.”

“ *Pasque-Dieu!* ” said Louis, “ that same reason is a good servant to one’s interests. I myself am never so reasonable as when I cut off a head that annoys me.”

He glanced, rasping his frosted chin, at the chaplain and down. He could gauge this jocund suitor well enough ; he knew him to be at heart a libertine and self-seeker ; but, inasmuch as

his own faith was a conglomeration of hypocrisy and abject superstition, he dreaded always to question the casuistries of its anointed ministers. One could never tell what might befall.

The matter under discussion turned upon the wisdom of appointing a new head to the Priory of St. Come, an important foundation in the southern quarters of the city. Long months past the King had granted a reluctant permission to its aged chief to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land ; and the old man had gone and he had not returned. Time went by ; no news had ever been received of the wayfarer ; by degrees it had come to be concluded that death or captivity had terminated his pious adventure. The young monks of St. Come, freed from his restraining hand, had begun to break bounds ; scandals were getting rife ; interested observers impressed upon the King the moral certainty of the old prior's death, and the necessity of his bringing the monastery again under the disciplinary control of a head. Amongst these the most pertinacious, and, as possessing the royal ear, the most hopeful, was the Chaplain Père Bonaventure, who greatly coveted for himself the

desirable office. It promised him almost illimitable opportunities for the sort of life he favoured.

"This dream, father, of which you spoke," said the King, without raising his eyes—"it seemed to have its significance, you would imply—some bearing on the case?"

"I would imply nothing of the sort," answered the chaplain. "We are expressly warned against attaching a prognostic value to these figments—though, to be sure, we might claim our justification in Holy Writ."

"Given the seer," said Louis. "Well, well; relate thy dream."

"Methought," said the priest, "that thou and I stood beside a church, in the walls of which hard by appeared a little threatening fissure. And the monks, instead of attending to their office, kept revelry; and always with the sound of their roystering the fissure extended. But thou, while I still urged upon thee the necessity of seeking and amending from within the ever-widening evil, would persist in holding me in converse, saying, 'Patience yet a little, father, and we will enter.' And suddenly there came a clap of song surmounting all in blasphemy, and with a roar the breach burst and the tower

rocked and the walls sank down upon us both, crushing out our lives."

He ended, his eyes slewed craftily upon the other. "From Joseph, through the royal succession," he said, "descends the gift of interpretation. To me it was just a dream."

The King looked up. "*Pasque-Dieu!*" he said—"and to us a providence, since it gives us a pretext for disposing of a pest. Go, go, in God's name"—he paused to raise his hat—"and be Prior of St. Come."

He was rid at last of an importunity, though he was only to exchange it for a worse.

He was walking in his garden one day weeks later, when there came towards him an old, blanched figure, feverishly paddling with a pilgrim's crossed staff and mumbling as he approached. It was the aged Prior of St. Come, delayed in his return by cross winds and crosser ailments.

Louis, coming to a stop, stood conning the apparition half-petrified. For a moment, indeed, he fancied it to be a veritable wraith, so whitely emaciated looked the face, set in its cloudy fleece of beard and hair, with the eyes like two black borings.

"*Adjuva nos, Domine, adjuva nos!* " he muttered, crossing himself.

The old man tottered forward, and cried in a shrill tone: "Restore to me my fold, son Louis—restore to me my fold ! "

The voice, and, more than it, the words, broke the spell. The King's lips tightened, shrewd and caustic. Not on such worldly interests were a spirit bent.

"Welcome, father," he said—" thou art welcome home."

"No welcome," cried the old man. "My children disown me; another sits in my place. I but carried my pitcher to the well, and lo ! when I returned with it brimming, the door was locked against me. They feign to know me not ; they stand and revile me ; let me in to them that I may afford good evidence of my identity."

He was a spirited ancient, and he shook his staff meaningly.

"That may not be," said Louis smoothly, "since you are pronounced deceased."

"By whom?"

"By the King."

"I am, nevertheless, very much alive."

"Impossible, when the King himself has

ruled you dead. Why else should he have filled your office? As Prior, father, believe us, you are hopelessly defunct; as priest and man you may yet exist on our sufferance. We do not hold it altogether a capital offence, your thus presuming to refute our conclusions by being alive; yet, *Pasque-Dieu!* the inconvenience you cause us by your inconsiderateness is little less than monstrous. We should have liked to hear some note of apology from you, some hint of regret for your unconscionable survival; but there, it is a self-seeking world."

The old man stood amazed and speechless; nor was his bewilderment lessened by the kindness with which the King presently took his arm and walked him off up the garden.

"A monarch's word, father," said Louis, "is sacred, as much to himself as to another. Anything else that it is in our power to bestow upon you we shall be happy to consider in the light of your palpable deserts. Now we shall place you in the hands of M. de Comines, our Secretary of State, with orders to him to attend to your interests."

So, with a hundred questions as to the Grand Turk and the pilgrim's adventures by the way,

he led him to the palace and got rid of him.

For good and all, as he supposed; but in that he was very quickly disillusioned. The deposed prior was by no means the man to take his cashiering meekly. Stubborn and masterful by nature, the authority of his late achievement had but consolidated his sense of righteousness. His interview with M. de Comines left him with no delusions. The Secretary bowed him out with a whole bouquet of flowery phrases, which, being cut for decorative purposes, were destined to bear no fruit. Père Bonaventure, lolling in his chair at St. Come, laughed securely. "*Rira bien qui rira le dernier!*" chanted his predecessor with a bitter grimness,

He appeared at the next royal levée, and renewed his petition; his Majesty was gentle but expostulatory. He sought to penetrate once more into the Louvre garden, generally open to men of piety, but, being repulsed by the guard, took his station at likely exits, and clamoured when the King went by. His persecution of his monarch became by degrees persistent and intolerable, Louis grew to dread the inevitable apparition with its wail,

monotonous and eternal, "Restore to me my fold!" The creature got upon his nerves, and even threatened to spoil his sleep. Then one day, quite suddenly and characteristically, he resolved to rid himself of the incubus. He summoned his provost-marshal, Tristan l'Hermite, and sitting humped in his chair, closed one eye, and focussed the other shrewdly on his favourite.

"Tristan," he said, "divinity utters itself in the mouths of kings—is it not so?"

The officer, a thick-set, beetle-browed boar of a man, whose body was encased in steel covered by a blue tabard embroidered with fleurs-de-lys, grunted in reply. Louis remained silent.

"Why waste words, gossip?" said Tristan. "Tell me the job and the man."

His eyes, red and projecting, rolled in their sockets. He gave his flock of coarse hair a contemptuous shake.

"Wherefore," went on the other, contemplative, "to traverse a royal decision is to commit treason against Heaven—a crime even the more abhorrent in one who professes himself a minister of religion."

"The man?" repeated Tristan.

"Hast thou heard speak, Tristan," said the King, "of this troublesome prior of St. Come?"

The Provost-Marshal turned and made for the door.

"Tristan!" cried the King; but without effect. He uncoiled himself with a smile. "*Pasque-Dieu*," he said, "what a precipitate fellow! But at least I can sleep to-night with a peaceful conscience."

And yet, when taking the air the next morning in company of this very confidant, there, slipped in by the relaxed guard, was the familiar, hated figure, pleading and clamouring.

"Hog! Dolt!" cried the King, maddened beyond all subterfuge, turning on his henchman: "Did I not tell thee to rid me of the prior of St. Come?"

"Highty-tighty, gossip!" answered the Provost—"what's all this to-do? And have I not?"

"The prior, I say—the prior?"

"Fast in a sack, gossip, and lying these ten hours past at the bottom of the Seine."

"Fool! But I meant this one!"

"Phew! Why didn't you say so? The prior,

quotha. This is not the prior. But rest easy; the mistake is soon amended."

"No," said the King, who after all had a sense of humour; "this is Heaven's hand, and I but the poor tool in it. The prior claim is his"—and he turned to the suppliant. "Go," he said, "in peace, old man. Return to thy flock. The seat is once more vacant, and thy petition is granted."

CAPTAIN MACARTNEY

ONE dark November afternoon in the year 1712 a horseman, riding westwards from Cobham village, in Surrey, pulled up at the junction of the road with the Kingston and Guildford highway, and dismounted in order that he might read the terms of a proclamation pasted upon the signpost there.

"Whereas," ran the advertisement, "Bernard Macartney, Captain in her Majesty's forces, stands charged with the wilful murder of James Douglas, Duke of Hamilton, in Hyde Park on the 15th of this present month, a reward of *two hundred pounds* is hereby offered to any person or persons who shall discover and apprehend, or cause to be discovered or apprehended, the said Captain Bernard Macartney, to be paid by the Lords Commissioners of her Majesty's Treasury upon his being apprehended and lodged in any one of her Majesty's gaols."

The traveller rose from his perusal with a grin.

"And so they bell the cat," said he. "Now, if *I* were this Macartney—I say *if* I were—methinks I should feign to be one of my own pursuers lusting to gain the reward. There's no disguise for some men like honesty, nor, in certain cases, no self-help like self-sacrifice."

He remounted and pushed leisurely on his way, cutting across the high-road, and taking the track for Byfleet, which ran herefrom over Cobham Heath, a lonely and near treeless waste. Naturally, as he rode, his mind was busy over the event which had produced the proclamation—the recent fatal duel, that is to say, between the Lords Hamilton and Mohun. The sensation the affair had caused was due as much to the reputed foul play which had characterised it as to the exalted rank of its principals and its tragic termination. The meeting—ostensibly the result of a dispute concerning some family property—had taken place at seven in the morning near the Ring in Hyde Park—that fashionable "dusty mill-horse drive" which lay off Tyburn Lane, about mid-way between the Tyburn and Hyde Park Gate turnpikes—and there were six con-

cerned in it, three of a side. The provocation, given and accepted, had been, it was rumoured rightly or wrongly, a mere blind to a premeditated murder. His Grace of Hamilton—then on the eve of his departure for Paris as the Queen's Ambassador, and the holder of a watching brief, as it were, on behalf of St. Germains—was notoriously obnoxious to Marlborough and the Whigs, and the quarrel, the whisper went, had been thrust upon him at the hands of a creature of the Duke's, a discredited brute and libertine, whose challenge, under the circumstances, he might very well have ignored. But his Grace had an invincible spirit, and the desire, perhaps, to rid the world of an intolerable ruffian ; and so the meeting had occurred. At its outset, without any feint of punctilio, the two had rushed at one another more like hyenas than men, a world of long-smothered exasperation, no doubt, nerving their hands ; and, amidst the rain of stabs and blows that followed, Mohun had been the first to fall. And while he had lain on the ground, gasping out his life, the other, also sorely wounded, leaning above him, Macartney, it was said, had run up behind and, giving the Duke his death-blow, had escaped with his surviving

companion in iniquity. The Duke had been helped towards the Cake-house—that little, pretty, rustic lodge, with its green trees and pond, whither fashion was used to resort for its syllabubs and “pigeon-pie puff”—but had died on the grass before he could reach it. And so the matter had ended for all but the absconding seconds.

“And those,” thought the traveller, “can spell out proclamations, no doubt, with the best of their pursuers. I put my money on Macartney.”

He was a spare, small-boned man, with a delicate, invalidish face and an expression on it of impudent temerity. His voice cracked when he raised it, and he was prone to spasms of laughter which hurt his chest. His hat, his heavy surtout, his great jack-boots seemed all too large for him, like a preposterous shell to a very little tortoise; but he rode with spirit, making small account of his trappings and the lonely road and sinister weather. In fact, as with many sickly constitutions, his elasticity and muscular strength were, relatively, abnormal.

The heath, desolation manifest, rolled on before him in brown, wind-shivered billows; the sky was like a slab of grey stone, roofing a

dead world. There was a wolfish snarl in the air, a threat of coming snow.

Suddenly, without a note of warning, a burst and ring of hoofs sounded in the road close behind him. Wheeling on the instant, he observed a stranger, the noise of whose approach had evidently fallen deadened on the spongy turf-side by which he had ridden.

"How now!" demanded the traveller, in his quick little voice: "what the devil do you, springing upon me like this?"

"Pardon, pardon," cried the stranger. He rode up, breathing as if winded. "I am a timid man, sir, and the prospect looked wicked, and, seeing you going before, I ventured to push on to crave your company. This place hath a dreary notorious reputation, I am told, and I am very nervous."

His jovial face, twinkling, for all the cold, with perspiration, seemed to belie his assertion. It was broad, and flat of surface, with the features in low relief; and its mouth was so wide that, when distended in a smile, all above appeared detachable, like the lid of a comic tobacco-jar. By the tokens of his greasy jasey, with the little soiled round hat on top, and the clerical cut of

his coat, he might have been a damaged parson, who had taken the wrong turning and missed his way to paradise.

The other conned him speculatively.

"What made you ride on the grass?" said he.

"Why, I feared to alarm ye," answered the newcomer, "and so miss the chance of a way-fellow."

"Gad-so!" exclaimed the traveller. "And whither, by your leave, may your road lead you over this same wicked heath?"

"Sir," said the stranger, "if the question is scarce pertinent, the candour of my cloth responds. I am riding to seek preferment of the Queen's own Majesty at Windsor. Is the confidence to be reciprocal?"

"I am escaping from my creditors," said the small man. "Shall I turn out my pockets, that you may witness to their emptiness?"

The stranger endeavoured to look grave.

"This suspicion," he said, "is unworthy."

"Of whom?"

"Of us both, sir. You make me fear I have misplaced my confidence."

"In the richness of the bone you proposed to pick? Very possibly you have."

They were slowly pacing their horses all this time side by side. The road was utterly deserted, the prospect of the dreariest. A straggle of withered thorns, running darkly up the slope of a low hill to the left, alone broke the almost treeless desolation.

"Ride on, sir, ride on," said the stranger in an offended voice. "Better my own fearful company than a comrade so mistrustful."

He pulled on his rein and fell back. The other did the same.

"Great God!" cried the stranger. "Who's this?"

Almost without a sound, it seemed, a horseman had broken from the shelter of the thorns, and drawn up in the middle of the track, barring their way. In the same instant, the clerical gentleman, who had fallen again behind, whipped a pistol from his skirt-pocket and shot his companion's horse dead. The bullet entered behind the shoulder, and the beast, doubling up its forelegs, pitched and collapsed. Its rider, flung over its head, gathered his wits with agility, and sat up to encounter the vision of a couple of rascal faces looking down upon him.

"Do me the justice to attest," he said to the

pseudo-parson, "that I never for a moment believed in you."

The other beamed over him, his pistol still smoking in his hand.

"And be damned to your scepticism!" said he. "For may I never launch soul on its flight again if I am not what I look, a broken hedge-parson."

"Enough of that, Tom," said the second rogue, a most butchering, determined-looking scoundrel. "His Honour's swollen head calls for some blood-letting. Stand away while I give him t'other barrel."

"What! are you going to murder me?" cried the victim.

"Aye, we are that," answered the ruffian. "A dead man's easier stripped than a live one, and makes less complaint after."

"I'll give you a hundred reasons for sparing me?"

"Hold, Jemmy!" said the parson. "The pick of a hundred will do. What reason of reasons, Mr. Bankrupt?"

"Why, the money in my pocket, which, if it's more than a beggarly five guineas, may I eat my words."

" That you shall, and well peppered, I warrant you."

" I'll give you my bond for fifty, to be paid on personal presentation."

" 'A bird in the hand,' mister. Is that your best?"

" You'd never murder a man for five guineas?" cried the traveller, his voice cracking.

" Five guineas!" echoed the parson with an oath: " five testers; five groats; five copper farthings—what life is worth more? Give him the lead, Jemmy."

" Hold! I'm Captain Macartney!"

" Captain——! Phew—w—w—!"

A moment's intense silence followed. The two amazed ruffians looked at one another with eyes into which a gleeful cupidity was slowly born. " Captain!" Their gaze was transferred to the sitting figure. Jemmy lowered his pistol. The parson was all one ineffable smile.

" It fits, by God!" said he. " Why did it never occur to me? Two hundred pound, Jemmy, my boy! There's Sir Townley Shore handy. We must risk it. Up with him before you. You've given us the best reason the last, Captain, my love. And you prefer the gallows

to a bullet? Well, that's just a matter of taste."

They bound his arms behind him, and Jemmy set him before him on the big Flanders mare that he rode ; and so they carried their prize, choosing the obscure ways in preference, to the house of Sir Townley Shore, the great county magistrate and magnate of Stoke d'Abernon, which lay a couple of miles the other side of Cobham.

There was a fine excitement in the Court when it was known that the notorious Captain was apprehended. Sir Townley, who was just come in and sitting down to his dinner, ordered in his staff, with a stout ranger or two for extra support, and sent for the prisoner and his guard. But the moment he clapped eyes on the former : " Why, Jack," cried he in astonishment, " what the plague do you in this company ? "

The two rogues, at that cry, stiffened aghast ; but their captive advanced with a grin.

" I'll tell you, Townley," said he. " I'd not left you and the White Lion Inn a quarter of an hour, when, going on my way, these two gentlemen shot my horse, and, falling upon me, would have murdered me too had I not thought of the expedient of calling myself Macartney ;

whereby I not only incited them, hoping for the reward, to carry me into a place of safety, but I have the pleasure of presenting you with a couple of very complete gallows-birds for your trussing."

He turned on the paralysed ex-cleric with a little gasp of laughter.

"You have come the right road for preferment, parson," said he. "You are going to be exalted like Haman."

THE DUC DE GUISE

THE Queen-Mother, Catherine de Medici, was giving a ball, characteristically insolent in its conception, at the royal palace of the Louvre. All the principal ladies of the Court were invited to attend it, and each was to be accompanied by her *cavaliere-servente*, wearing her mistress's livery.

"I beg you, madam, to excuse yourself," said the Duc de Guise to his wife. "It is a censorious age, and your condescensions might be misconstrued."

He was a tall, well-figured man, with a somewhat supercilious expression, emphasised by a prominent underlip. The cut of his face, cold and aquiline, against his ruff, suggested a cameo in high relief. His beard, of a bright brown, was "stilettoed"; a scar defaced his left cheek near the eye, and, in its fading or flushing, betrayed the degree of his emotions. It was curiously

in evidence now, though his voice and manner kept their measured quiet.

"Condescensions—to whom, *mon chéri?*" asked the Duchess, whisking round as she sat under the hands of her tire-woman. She was a beauty, once a princess of Cleves, and as saucy and wilful as she was bewitching. Her husband, with a wave of his hand, dismissed the attendant.

"To M. Saint-Mesgrin, madam," he said.

She laughed. "Thou hast named my chosen cavalier, Henri. What an odd chance!"

Saint-Mesgrin was one of the King's mignons, and his name and the lovely Duchess's were too often associated of late for the Guise's tolerance.

"Is it not?" he said. "I cannot imagine what suggested it."

He took a sweetmeat from a little gold box, in shape like a shell, that he carried, and put it between his lips.

"I could not believe," said the lady, pouting and in an aggrieved voice, "that the Duc de Guise would condescend to jealousy."

"Nor does he, madam," answered the Duke. "It is his honour for which he is concerned."

She flounced a shoulder on him.

"O, very well, monsieur! You know best what is worth your consideration. But, if I were a man, I should not, I think, consign my honour to the keeping of a despised wife. Will you be pleased to call back my maid?"

"You persist, then, in going?"

"Will you call Celestine?"

"Your mere presence there, and in such company, will be construed, you must understand, into a justification for all the calumnies and slanders which have pursued your name of late."

"What matter, if you do not so construe it? You are not jealous, *grâce à Dieu*. And as to that great matter of your honour, I will put it for safe custody into the hands of Saint-Mesgrin, and you can ask him for an account of it when you please."

"To be sure I shall, and very soon perhaps. You will go to the ball, then, madam?"

"You know I must not disappoint the Queen-Mother," she said hotly; but a certain trepidation was beginning to flutter her heart.

"You are resolved?"

"Will you stop me?"

"By no means."

She laughed defiantly.

"O, most certainly I shall go then!"

The Duke rose, and bowed very gravely.

"I wish you a good night, madam," he said.

"Go, and enjoy yourself while you may."

She bit her lip as he left the room. For a moment she was half resolved to yield her pride to the panic fear that had seized her; but the perverse demon prevailed, and she called back her woman.

She went to the questionable ball, and the night passed for her in a sort of conscious delirium peopled with shapes of gaudy terror. The King, the Queen-Mother, even Saint-Mesgrin himself, seemed forms of demoniac malice, luring her on to her damnation. She longed, and yet feared, to fly the unreal pandemonium. Her own peaceful bed figured to her as something pathetic beyond words—a haven of dear refuge which she had forfeited for ever.

At length, at five o'clock in the morning, the ball broke up, and she hurried home with what feverish haste the crowd would permit her. At bed, in the Hôtel de Guise, she cowered beneath the coverlets, and, the attendants dismissed, lay shivering like a mouse in a trap. She hardly dared to breathe, for fear of evoking some

menacing echo. She could have thought that something horrible, like a monstrous cat, crouched outside her door.

All of a sudden her heart seemed to stop. Quick, soft steps were coming down the corridor, and the next moment her door opened, and the Duke, followed by a servitor bearing a bowl of broth on a salver, entered the room.

She uttered a little stifled cry. There was something even horrible and suggestive in the choice of the attendant, who was a small, vacant-faced deaf-mute much employed by her husband on secret services. She sat up in her dishevelled beauty, white and panting.

"O, Henri, *mon ami*," she whispered, "you have frightened me so!"

He locked the door behind him and came forward, his eyes brilliant, his lips smiling.

"That is a sad result of my consideration," he said. "I foresaw very well that your heated blood would prevent you from sleeping, and that a counter caloric would be necessary for your rest. Thank my foresight, madam, and drink down this broth."

"No, Henri—no, no!"

"*Peste!* this is a peevish return, *ma mie*.

Are you such a child to cry at your draught, and when it comes in so pleasant a disguise? Why, it needs no physician to see the excited wakefulness in your eyes. Down with it, and you will sleep—take my word for it."

"Henri, before God I have done no harm!"

"What resistance—out of all proportion with the act! Who said you had done harm—or, if he thought it, would dream of retaliating with such kindness. Come, shut your eyes and gulp."

"I will not indeed."

Desperate to run, she put a foot over the bedside. He held her back with a force gentle but irresistible.

"Henri!" she cried in agony, "I was wretched all the evening—O, believe me!"

"Ah! I thought you did a mistaken thing in going. What a pity you rejected my advice!"

She shrank from him, her throat gulping, her eyes clouded with horror.

"Your voice is cold," she whispered—"cold, cold as your eyes, as your heart. O, Death! Will you have no mercy? Henri!"

"Why, you are overwrought, lady. This is foolish. Come, the broth is cooling."

"Must I drink it?"

"To please me."

"My confessor first—only for five minutes."

"What! for a dose of medicine? You speak as though it were poison—the *morceau italianisé*! And even were it, what could lie to confess in so clear a conscience?"

"You never loved me. Give me the bowl."

"I will hold it to your lips."

"No, no, you cannot, you will not."

"You make me obstinate, madam. I am not wont to be disobeyed."

"O, horror!"

"I never loved you, you say. Do you love me?"

"Before God, yes!"

"A little thing to refuse your love. Come now, it must be done!"

A shudder convulsed her whole frame; and then suddenly she stiffened, white as ashes.

"I will drink it," she said, "and then perhaps you will believe in me."

With a hand as steady as a rock he held the bowl to her lips. Her teeth chattered on its rim a moment, and then she drank, and stopped.

"To the dregs," he said quietly.

She took the cup from his hand, and, looking

him straight in the eyes, drained it, threw it from her, and closing her lids, lay back.

One moment he stood gazing down, then, beckoning to his attendant, very softly left the room, locking the door behind him.

She never moved, she never opened her eyes. Still, as though death had already seized her, she lay there, a creeping rigor seeming to paralyse her limbs. Only her brain was busy, deliriously, unceasingly, gnawing like a rat in an empty house. What conscious reason it possessed was absorbed exclusively in the coming horror of her passing. She was stunned beyond any thought of eternity, or of the part her sinful soul must play in it. Love—the love of earth, of man, of power—was a thing shrunk to insignificance, a dreary, discredited enchantment. The thought of the poison that possessed her absorbed her whole being. She had nothing left in common with that sweet, fantastic conceit, a desirable woman. She was gold turned grey and acrid from contact with mercury—a thing preposterous and contaminated. How was the bane about to act, to assert its hideous mastery? Already strange stings and tremors were apparent in her veins. Was she to be drugged into a

merciful oblivion, or wrenched and distorted out of all semblance to humanity? Fearful memories of tales she had heard whispered thronged into her mind. He would not have spared her the worst; why should he, a vengeance revealed so soulless, so calculatingly diabolic?

She felt the poison creeping up her veins. When it reached her heart, it would seize on there, she knew, and tear her to death with its red-hot fangs. A mortal terror throttled her; she was dying, helpless, abandoned, alone to all eternity. With a supreme effort she struggled momentarily out of the shadows, and uttered a choking scream.

The key turned in the lock and her husband entered.

“ What is it, *ma mie*? ” he said, and hurried to her side.

She turned a grey and ghastly face to him.

“ The poison—O, the poison ! ”

“ What poison ? ”

“ The broth ! ”

“ Foolish ! It was just broth, no more. I swear it on my honour.”

“ Henri ! ” Her hands began to tremble. He caught them in his own.

"I had hoped it would cure thy fever," he said.

"It is cured," she answered, and burst into overwhelming tears.

He took her into his arms. "Hush!" he said. "We have passed some unhappy hours, *mignonne*, each for the other's sake. Now shall we call quits?"

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